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REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

143  
**Horizon**

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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# COMMENT

FIGMENT of a powerful daydream, the name of Filmore Van Rensselaer Crutch is but little known in this country. Mr. Crutch is a very rich man, else he had but a small chance of being catapulted into existence. Public Utilities, one might say, were his middle name, in the distant days in which he was raking in the fortune which he has now chosen so worthily and brilliantly to dispense. Like many American millionaires who feel a certain guilty curiosity about the arts, Filmore looked around for a field where the weight of his patronage could still be put to advantage. Atlantic Awards; Occident Prizes; Thousand Pound First Novels; Rockefeller Grants; Publishers' Travelling Scholarships—it would seem that never has the young author been better provided for; the mere intimation of a desire to write causes the cornucopia of Anglo-American money to pour into his lap. Filmore read through the terms of reference and allotted capital of the various benevolent pressure groups with a sinking feeling. Too late, too late! Suddenly an idea gripped him. What about the guys who judge all this muck! Who pays *them*? It was in this way that the foundation was laid for the now famous Society for the Redemption of Middle-aged Hacks. 'The proposition is this,' explains Filmore. 'A guy gives his dough to a promising young writer. What guarantee has he got that the writer will ever turn out anything or use the money except to spend it on drink and women? But with a middle-aged hack the probability is that he's done at least one good book in the past, is used to working, and could do another. I'd rather pick an old car of a good make off the dump than buy a new Cheapie. Let's see what happens. I hear of a new hack. My boys look him over. We aim to give him back his self-respect. As a rule, he's got three or four jobs, all badly paid; he dabbles with the cinema, drones on the B.B.C., has a leathery face, wandering alcoholic eye, worries all night, dirty suit, bald patch, scuffy collar, anxious to please but forgotten how, been thought a bit of a genius, now he's right out on a limb, a middle-aged hack if ever there was one. This is how we recondition—er—"redeem" him. First we study his type—find out what his four jobs were, analyse the books he hasn't written. Then we give him a psychological treatment. Explain to him that literature is an impossible career, that he must be damn good to have written



## [COMMENT]

anything. The treatment now starts. We reckon it costs twenty thousand dollars. The hack is taken off all his jobs. This is often very painful. "But who'll review the gardening books for the *Financial Times*," he screams. "Not you—you won't even have to read the damn thing," the Institute replies. Next we close up the hack's home. The kids go to school: the wife to her relations. The first year we spend in getting him back into the physical, mental and moral shape he was in when he did his best work. He goes on a cruise to the Bahamas, or we lend him a villa in Sicily; he visits tailors and hosiers again, we keep all the weekly papers away from him. Mostly he just sleeps. "Where's my wife," they sometimes say. "Stuck in the fish-queue somewhere. Don't you worry about her." "Sometimes I wake up in the night and fancy I hear her cough." "Don't think about it. Here's a receipt for your income tax for the last three years. Here's your ticket to Paris. Here's your wallet. Here's your travellers'-checks for the next six months; visas, hotel reservations." "Oh, Mr. Crutch—" "That's all right, nothing's too good for the author of *Flittershins* or *Ramshackle Roger*."

'After a year of untroubled sleep and care-free leisure the hack is unrecognizable. But he's not middle-aged for nothing. That's the beauty of it. He *wants* to work: he thinks of nothing now but the book he might have written. Doesn't just chain-smoke in night-clubs like a "Promising". He settles down into the lucid glow of second adolescence in his suite at the *France et Choiseul*. The next year he usually writes it. All the healthy self-indulgence of the first year is canalized into hard routine and creative energy. All the drudgery of the past spurs him on. The third year he revises. Breakfast, work, a swim before lunch, a siesta, tea, a drive. Then another hour of revision before dinner and dancing, conversation or bridge. The Sicilian spring, the Alpine summer, the Venetian autumn pass in a flash! The book is finished, the publisher's crazy. He's famous again!' 'And, pardon me, Mr. Crutch, what do you get out of it?' 'Just the satisfaction of a job well done—of seeing these poor human wrecks saved from their platitudes; the feeling that I have helped an artist to realize all his potentialities, set a poor warped plant that once bore fruit in the soil where it can straighten up, expand and once more give a bumper harvest.' 'Don't make me cry *too*, Mr. Crutch. Haven't you any other reason?' Filmore put one hand over his mouth and

## HORIZON

sucked a tooth. 'Three of my hacks won literary prizes this year,' he said. 'The Lemuria Award, The Forgotten Man Prize, The Troubleday Trophy. Each time they beat the "Promising" candidate, and one of them was fifty-four. Troubleday and Lemuria are both run by old acquaintances of mine who stem, like me, from Public Utilities.' He panted—then bellowed—'I'll break them now as I crushed them then'.

'Just one more question. What happens afterwards to these reconditioned hacks? Do you get any relapses?' I didn't like the look on his face, which was one of unimaginable disgust, as if he too smelled the mingled odour of wet pram and boiled cabbage from the back kitchen and overheard the dear voice, reminding me of fingers worn to the bone, of the best years of her life freely given to one ungrateful, though waited on hand and foot, until with a quiet oath, I redirected Filmore Van Rensselaer Crutch to the desolate place from which he sprang.

★ ★ ★

The February number of HORIZON consists of a complete short novel by Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (an Anglo-American tragedy). No extra copies. Please order now.

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*E. E. CUMMINGS*  
SEVEN POEMS

I

this(let's remember)day died again and  
again; whose golden,crimson dooms conceive

an oceaning abyss of orange dream

larger than sky times earth: a flame beyond  
soul immemorial forevering am—  
and as collapsing that grey mind by wave  
doom disappeared,out of perhaps(who knows?)

eternity floated a blossoming

(while anyone might slowly count to soon)  
rose—did you see her? darling,did you(kiss  
me)quickly count to never: you were wrong

—then all the way from perfect nowhere came

(as easily as we forget something)  
livingest the imaginable moon

II

neither awake  
(there's your general  
yas buy gad)  
nor asleep

booted & spurred  
with an apish grin  
(extremely like  
but quite absurd

gloved fist on hip  
& the scowl of a cannibal)  
there's your mineral  
general animal

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(five foot five)  
 neither dead  
 nor alive  
 (in real the rain)

## III

infinite jukethrob smoke & swallow to dis

gorge)

a sulky gob with entirely white  
 eyes of elsewhere

jabber while(infinite  
 fog & puking jukepulse hug)large less  
 than more magnetic pink unwhores

a wai  
 ter lugs his copious whichwhat skilfully here  
 &(simply infinite) there &

(smoke)a fair  
 y socked flopslump(& juke)ing shrieks Yew May  
 n't Dew Thiz Tew Mee

as somebody's almost moth  
 er folds(but infinite)gently up

the with  
 a carrotly youth blonde whis(gorgedis reswal  
 lowing spewnonspew clutch)pers again & again  
 (jukejog mist & strict)

& again  
 (ly infin)  
 It's Snowing Isn't That Perfectly Wonderful

## IV

jake hates

all the girls)the  
 shy ones,the bold  
 ones; the meek  
 proud sloppy sleek)  
 all except the cold

ones

## 5

V

's gulped by illimitable hell)



and never have breathed such miracle murdered we  
 whom cannot kill more mostful to arrive  
 each (futuring snowily which sprints for the  
 crumb of our Now)twiceuponatime wave—

put out your eyes,and touch the black skin  
 of an angel named imagination

## VI

this is a rubbish of human rind  
 with a photograph  
 clutched in the half  
 of a hand and the word  
 love underlined

this is a girl who died in her mind  
 with a warm thick scream  
 and a keen cold groan  
 while the gadgets purred  
 and the gangsters dined

this is a deaf dumb church and blind  
 with an if in its soul  
 and a hole in its life  
 where the young bell tolled  
 and the old vine twined

this is a dog of no known kind  
 with one white eye  
 and one black eye  
 and the eyes of his eyes  
 are as lost as you'll find

## VII

if(touched by love's own secret)we,like homing  
 through welcoming sweet miracles of air  
 (and joyfully all truths of wing resuming)  
 selves,into infinite tomorrow steer

—souls under whom flow(mountain valley forest)  
a million wheres which never may become  
one(wholly strange;familiar wholly)dearest  
more than reality of more than dream—

how should contented fools of fact envision  
the mystery of freedom:yet,among  
their loud exactitudes of imprecision,  
you'll(silently alighting)and i'll sing

while at us very deafly a most stares  
colossal hoax of clocks and calendars

## BERTRAND RUSSELL

### SIN

THE sense of sin has been one of the dominant psychological facts in history, and is still at the present day of great importance in the mental life of a large proportion of mankind. But although the *sense* of sin is easy to recognize and define, the *concept* of 'sin' is obscure, especially if we attempt to interpret it in non-theological terms. In this article I wish to consider the sense of sin psychologically and historically, and then to examine whether there is any non-theological concept in terms of which this emotion can be rationalized.

Some 'enlightened' persons believe themselves to have seen through 'sin', and to have discarded the whole complex of beliefs and emotions with which it is associated. But most of these persons, if scrutinized, will be found to have only rejected some prominent part of the received moral code—e.g. the prohibition of adultery—but to have retained, none the less, a moral code of their own, to which they give complete adherence. A man may, for instance, be a conspirator in a left-wing movement in a Fascist country; in the pursuit of his public objects he may consider himself justified in deceiving and hoodwinking half-hearted 'fellow-travellers', in stealing from the funds of reactionaries, in making love insincerely with a view to discovering secrets, and in committing murder when the situation seems to

demand it. He may at all times express himself with a devastating moral cynicism. Yet this very man, if he is caught and tortured with a view to discovering his confederates, may display a heroic endurance beyond the capacity of many who would consider him ethically vile. If he does at last give way and betray his comrades, he is likely to feel a burning sense of shame which may drive him to suicide. Or, to take a very different example, a man may, like the hero of Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma*, be morally contemptible in all respects except where his artistic conscience is involved, but in this one matter may be capable of very painful sacrifices. I am not prepared to maintain that to all men there are some acts that are felt as 'sin'; I am willing to believe that there are human beings who are utterly shameless. But I am convinced that they are few, and that they are not to be found among those who most loudly proclaim their own emancipation from moral scruples.

Most psycho-analysts make much of the sense of guilt or sin, which they seem to regard as innate. I cannot agree with them in this. I believe the psychological origin of the sense of guilt in the young to be fear of punishment or disapproval by parents or whoever is in authority. If a feeling of guilt is to result from punishment or disapproval, it is necessary, however, that authority should be respected, and not merely feared; where there is only fear, the natural reaction is an impulse to deceit or rebellion. It is natural to young children to respect their parents, but school boys are less apt to respect their teachers, with the result that only fear of punishment, not sense of sin, restrains them from many acts of disobedience. Disobedience, if it is to *feel* sinful, must be disobedience to an authority inwardly respected and acknowledged. A dog caught stealing a leg of mutton may have this feeling if he is caught by his master, but not if he is caught by a stranger.

The psycho-analysts, however, are certainly right in tracing the origins of a man's sense of sin to the very early years of childhood. In those years parental precepts are unquestioningly accepted, but impulse is too strong for them to be always obeyed; hence experience of disapproval is frequent and painful, and so is temptation which may be successfully resisted. In later life the parental disapproval may come to be almost forgotten, and yet there may still be a feeling of something painful associated with certain kinds of acts, and this feeling may translate itself into the conviction



That such acts are sinful. For those who believe that sin consists in disobedience to God the Father, the change of emotional pattern is very slight.

However, many men who do not believe in God nevertheless have a sense of sin. This may be merely a subconscious association with parental disapproval, or it may be fear of the bad opinion of a man's own herd, when the man is not a rebel against the herd's standards. Sometimes it is the sinner's own disapproval, quite independently of what others think, that makes him feel wicked. This is not likely to happen except to men who are unusually self-reliant or have exceptional gifts. If Columbus had abandoned the attempt to find the Indies, no one else would have blamed him, but one can imagine that he would have felt degraded in his own eyes. Sir Thomas More was removed from Oxford in his youth, on account of his determination to learn Greek in spite of the disapproval of his father and the University authorities. No doubt if he had yielded to the advice of his elders and betters he would have had a sense of sin, though everyone would have praised him.

The sense of sin has played a very important part in religion, more especially the Christian religion. In the Catholic Church it was one of the main sources of the power of the priesthood, and did much to facilitate the victory of the Popes in their long struggle with the Emperors. Psychologically and doctrinally, the sense of sin reached its acme in St. Augustine. But its origin lies far back in prehistoric times; in all the civilized nations of antiquity it was already well developed. In its earlier forms it was connected with ritual defilement and with breaches of taboo. Among the Greeks it was especially emphasized by the Orphics and by the philosophers whom they influenced. By the Orphics, as in India, sin was connected with transmigration: the sinful soul passed, after death, into the body of an animal, but after many purgative ages at last achieved emancipation from bondage to the wheel of life'. As Empedocles says:

'Whenever one of the daemons, whose portion is length of days, has sinfully polluted his hands with blood, or followed strife and foresworn himself, he must wander thrice ten thousand years from the abodes of the blessed, being born throughout the time in all manners of mortal forms. . . . One of these I now am, an exile and a wanderer from the gods for that I put my trust in insensate strife.'

In another fragment he says: 'Ah, woe is me that the pitiless day of death did not destroy me ere ever I did evil deeds of devouring with my lips!' It seems probable that these 'evil deeds' consisted of munching beans and laurel leaves for he says: 'Abstain wholly from laurel leaves', and again: 'Wretches, utter wretches! keep your hands from beans'. These passages illustrate the fact that sin, as originally conceived, was not essentially something that injured someone else, but merely something forbidden. This attitude persists to our own day in much of orthodox doctrine on sexual morality.

The Christian conception of sin owes more to the Jews than to the Greeks. The Prophets attributed the Babylonian captivity to the wrath of God, which was kindled by the heathen practices that were still prevalent while Judea was independent. At first the sin was collective and the punishment collective, but gradually, as the Jews became accustomed to the absence of political independence, a more individualistic view came to prevail: it was the individual who sinned, and the individual who would be punished. For a long time punishment was expected in this life, with the corollary that prosperity was a proof of virtue. But during the persecution at the time of the Maccabees it became evident that the most virtuous were, in this life, the most unfortunate. This stimulated belief in a future life of rewards and punishments, in which Antiochus would suffer and his victims would triumph—a point of view which, with appropriate modifications, passed over into the early Church and sustained it during the persecutions.

Sin, however, is psychologically very different when imputed to our enemies from what it is when thought of as our own shortcoming, for the one involves pride and the other humility. The extreme of humility is reached in the doctrine of original sin, of which the best exposition is to be found in St. Augustine. According to this doctrine, Adam and Eve were created with free will, and had the power of choice between good and evil. When they ate the apple they chose evil, and in that moment corruption entered into their souls. They and all their progeny were thenceforth unable to choose the good by the strength of their own unaided wills; only Divine Grace enabled the elect to live virtuously. Divine Grace is bestowed, without any guiding principle, upon some of those who have been baptized, but upon

no one else, with the exception of certain of the Patriarchs and Prophets, and a small number of miraculously enlightened pagans. The rest of mankind, although, since Grace is withheld, they are fatally predestined to sin, yet, because of their sin, are justly objects of God's wrath, and as such will suffer eternal perdition. St. Augustine enumerates the sins committed by infants at the breast, and does not shrink from the conclusion that infants who die unbaptized go to hell. The elect go to heaven because God chooses to make them the objects of His mercy: they are virtuous because they are elect, not elect because they are virtuous.

This ferocious doctrine, though accepted by Luther and Calvin, has not, since their time, been the orthodox teaching of the Catholic Church, and is now accepted by very few Christians, of whatever denomination. Nevertheless hell is still part of Catholic Dogma, though fewer people suffer damnation than was formerly supposed. And hell is justified as the appropriate punishment for sin.

The doctrine of original sin, according to which we shall all deserve punishment because of Adam's transgression, is one which strikes most people at the present day as unjust, although there are many who see no injustice when analogous doctrines are proclaimed in politics—for example, when it is thought right that German children born since 1939 should starve because their parents did not oppose the Nazis. This, however, even by its supporters, is recognized as rough human justice, and not of a sort to be ascribed to the Deity. The standpoint of modern liberal theologians is well set forth by Dr. Tennant in his book *The Concept of Sin*. According to him sin consists in acts of will that are in conscious opposition to a known moral law, the moral law being known by Revelation as God's will. It follows that a man destitute of religion cannot sin:

'If we press the indispensableness of the religious element in the concept of sin, and if we adopt the psychical definition of religion, then it will follow that persons, if any there be, possessing no religion—who would confess, that is to say, to entertaining no ideas of deity or of the supernatural, and to feeling no religious sentiment of any sort—cannot be accounted sinners at all, in the sense in which we agree to use that term, however morally evil, even from their own point of view, may be their lives.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 216.



It is difficult to know exactly what is meant by this statement, owing to the qualifications with which it is introduced. By the 'psychical' definition of religion the author means, as he has previously explained, whatever a man accepts in the way of religion, and not only what Christians regard as true religion. But it is not clear what is meant by 'feeling no religious sentiment of any sort'. I myself have 'sentiments'—emotions and moral convictions—which are apt to be associated with Christian beliefs, but I have no 'ideas of deity or of the supernatural'. I am not quite sure, therefore, whether, in Dr. Tennant's view, I am or am not capable of 'sin'. Nor am I sure whether, in my own view, there is a valid concept deserving to be called 'sin'. I know that certain acts, if I perform them, fill me with shame. I know that I find cruelty detestable and that I wish it did not exist; I know that failure to use to the full such talents as I may possess would feel to me like treachery to an ideal. But I am by no means certain how to rationalize these feelings, nor whether, if I succeeded in rationalizing them, the result would afford a definition of 'sin'.

If 'sin' means 'disobedience to the known will of God', then clearly sin is impossible for those who do not believe in God or do not think that they know His will. But if 'sin' means 'disobedience to the voice of conscience', then it can exist independently of theological beliefs. If it means only this, however, it lacks some properties commonly associated with the word 'sin'. Sin is usually thought of as deserving punishment, not only as a deterrent or as an incentive to reform, but on grounds of abstract justice. The sufferings of hell, theologians assure us, do not make tortured souls morally better; on the contrary, they persist in sin through all eternity, and have no power to do otherwise. The belief in 'sin' as something meriting the purely retributive infliction of pain is one which cannot be reconciled with any ethic at all analogous to that which I believe in, though it has been advocated independently of theology, for instance in G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*. When retribution for its own sake is not thought good, the concepts of 'justice' and 'punishment' need re-interpretation.

'Justice', in its legalistic interpretation, might be taken to mean 'reward according to desert'. But when retributive punishment for its own sake is no longer advocated, this can only mean

reward and punishment on the system most likely to promote 'socially desirable conduct'. It might happen, on occasion, that a man who expected punishment would undergo a change of heart if he were given a free pardon; in that case, it would be right to pardon him. It might also happen that a man who had acted in a socially desirable manner might have set an example which ought not to be followed in apparently similar cases, and on this account, it might be proper to punish him. (Nelson's blind eye.) In short, rewards and punishments should be awarded according to the desirability of their social effects, and not according to some supposed absolute standard of merit or demerit. No doubt it will, as a rule, be wise to reward those whose conduct is socially desirable and punish those whose conduct is harmful, but exceptions are conceivable and are likely actually to occur from time to time. Such a conception of 'justice' as underlies the belief in heaven and hell is not defensible if 'right' conduct is that which promotes the satisfaction of desire.

The conception of 'sin' is closely connected with the belief in free will, for, if our actions are determined by causes over which we have no control, retributive punishment can have no justification. I think the ethical importance of free will is sometimes exaggerated, but it cannot be denied that the question is relevant in relation to 'sin', and something must therefore be said about it.

'Free will' must be taken to mean that a volition is not always, or not necessarily, the result of previous causes. But the word 'cause' has not as clear a meaning as could be wished. The first step towards clarity is to substitute 'causal law' for 'cause'. We shall say that an event is 'determined' by previous events if there is a law by means of which it can be inferred if a sufficient number of previous events are known. We can predict the movements of the planets because they follow from the law of gravitation. Sometimes, human actions are equally predictable; it may be that Mr. So-and-so, on meeting a stranger, never fails to mention his acquaintance with Lord Such-and-such. But, as a general rule, we are not able to predict with any accuracy what people will do. This may be only from inadequate knowledge of the relevant laws, or it may be because there are no laws that invariably connect a man's action with his past and present circumstances. The latter possibility, which is that of free will, is always unhesitatingly rejected except when people are thinking about the

free-will problem. No one says: 'It is useless to punish theft, because perhaps people henceforth will like punishment'. No one says: 'It is useless to address a letter, because the postman, having free will, may decide to deliver it somewhere else'. No one says: 'It is useless to offer wages for work that you wish done, because people may prefer starvation'. If free will were common, all social organization would be impossible, since there would be no way of influencing men's actions.

While, therefore, as a philosopher I hold the principle of universal causation to be open to question, as a common-sense individual I hold that it is an indispensable postulate in the conduct of affairs. For practical purposes we must assume that our volitions have causes, and our ethics must be compatible with this assumption.

Praise and blame, rewards and punishments, and the whole apparatus of the criminal law, are rational on the deterministic hypothesis, but not on the hypothesis of free will, for they are all mechanisms designed to cause volitions that are in harmony with the interests of the community, or what are believed to be its interests. But the conception of 'sin' is only rational on the assumption of free will, for, on the deterministic hypothesis, when a man does something that the community would wish him not to do, that is because the community has not provided adequate motives to cause him not to do it, or perhaps could not have provided adequate motives. We all recognize this second possibility in the case of insanity: a homicidal lunatic would not be deterred from murder even if he were certain to be hanged for it, and therefore it is useless to hang him. But sane people, when they commit a murder, usually do so in the hope of escaping detection, and it is this fact that makes it worth while to punish them when they are detected. Murder is punished, not because it is a sin and it is good that sinners should suffer, but because the community wishes to prevent it, and fear of punishment causes most people to abstain from it. This is completely compatible with the deterministic hypothesis, and completely incompatible with the hypothesis of free will.

I conclude that free will is not essential to any rational ethic, but only to the vindictive ethic that justifies hell and holds that 'sin' should be punished regardless of any good that punishment may do. I conclude, also, that 'sin', except in the sense of conduct



towards which the agent, or the community, feel an emotion of disapproval, is a mistaken concept calculated to promote needless cruelty and vindictiveness when it is others that are thought to sin, and a morbid self-abasement when it is ourselves whom we condemn.

But it must not be supposed that, in rejecting the concept of 'sin', we are maintaining that there is no difference between right and wrong actions. 'Right' actions are those that it is useful to praise, 'wrong' actions are those that it is useful to blame. Praise and blame remain as powerful incentives, tending to promote conduct which serves the general interest. Rewards and punishments also remain. But with regard to punishment, the rejection of 'sin' makes a difference that has some practical importance, for, on the view which I advocate, the punishment is always *per se* an evil, and is only justified by its deterrent or reformative effect. If it were possible to keep the public persuaded that burglars go to prison, while in fact they are made happy in some remote South Sea island, that would be better than punishment; the only objection to the scheme is that it would inevitably leak out sooner or later, and then there would be a general outbreak of burglary.

What applies to punishment applies also to blame. The fear of being blamed is a very powerful deterrent, but actual blame, when the blameworthy action has been performed, is, as a rule, painful without being morally helpful. The person blamed is likely to become sullen and defiant, to despair of the good opinion of the community, and to acquiesce in the position of an Ishmael. This result is especially probable when it is not an individual, but a large group, that is blamed. After the First World War the victors told the Germans that the guilt was wholly Germany's, and even forced them to sign a document by which they pretended to acknowledge their sole culpability. After the Second World War Montgomery issued a proclamation telling German parents to explain to their children that British soldiers could not smile at them because of the wickedness of their fathers and mothers. This was, on both occasions, bad psychology and bad politics, of a sort that is encouraged by belief in the doctrine of 'sin'. We are all what our circumstances have made us, and if that is unsatisfactory to our neighbours, it is for them to find ways of improving us. It is very seldom that moral reprobation is the best way of achieving this object.

T. C. WORSLEY

## THE SON OF HIS FATHER

THAT they decided—mother and son—to spend his first half-term week-end attending Rankin's *matinée* was, she felt, a particularly amusing instance of their attitude towards him. For five years, ever since Eldrich at a precocious nine had been capable of appreciating nuances, they had allowed themselves to treat Rankin as their immensely private, immensely entertaining joke. So private indeed—and consequently so much the more entertaining—that they had never needed to put it into words; it was between them in glances and smiles, in imitations and parodies of his flamboyant, affected, dramatic mannerisms. They could hardly be accused of disloyalty because they did this openly to his face and in front of friends as well as between themselves. And if Rankin didn't mind it in front of himself, why should he mind it behind his back?

Elva's grievance—or one of her grievances—was just that he didn't mind; he didn't seem to see. He seemed to treat their performance as if it were the same sort of flattering attention as the laughs he knew so well how to raise from a company at rehearsal. Or perhaps he did—he must have—perceived the edge on *her* mockery. It was simply that about her he no longer cared. But he might at least have been counted on for some perception over his son. Yet apparently he was too egocentric even for that. He doubtless assumed that he exacted the boy's homage as effortlessly as he exacted his huge public's and would take the child's irony for a form of shy praise. She sometimes wondered whether, supposing he could be brought to realize how subtly and surely Eldrich saw through him, that wouldn't be the one way of slipping under his defences. Once or twice, piqued by some more than usually dense disregard of her feelings in public, she had been tempted to try it out, to lead the boy on to showing their joint hand. But on each occasion Eldrich—he was very young, of course—hadn't, it seemed, quite dared to take her up.

The joke about going to Rankin's *matinée* (it was a special occasion—the opening of an Elizabethan playhouse restored by the beneficence and industry of a well-known patron of the arts)

was that their ironical attitude was among their own friends and acquaintances an accepted fact, the force of which could never be quite accurately gauged. For they periodically did something like this, a kind of flaunting of their presence instead of their absence on occasions when it was not particularly called for. And these occasions acted with a special charm for her as drawing them so publicly close together. It was for her like the open confession of a secret caress, the only relic of the caresses she had loved to lavish on the small, dark, enchanting infant and couldn't any longer on the lanky fourteen-year-old boy. Not that she wanted to now, anyway. She wasn't that kind of mother. On the contrary, another of her grievances against Rankin—it was the only one that still between them produced 'rows'—was just that he didn't co-operate with her in helping Eldrich to become a man. Fortunately she herself had an athletic strain in her—it was a relic like her hair of a Northern strain—and this enabled her to introduce him to many of the boyish pastimes which his father, who had been an athlete in his boyhood, might so easily have done if he had cared to. It was left to her to initiate him into rock-climbing and riding, swimming and sailing, all of which at least provided delicious expeditions together at week-ends and in the holidays.

Something of the kind 'they', their set, would have expected her to organize for Eldrich's first 'week-end' from his first public school term. The joke was, instead, to claim the two complementary seats which were always available for them at first nights or special occasions; and the sting was made all the sharper by their coming to the decision right on top of one of Rankin's most blatant pieces of neglect.

Eldrich had from the very beginning of his public school life shown great promise at rugger. He had played in the Colts trials and then in the first Colts match, and he expected to be selected for the second. She and Rankin had promised, if he were, to go down and watch the game, and when a telegram came from him confirming his selection, she had gone with the orange form to Rankin's sitting-room. She had pushed open the door and leant against it waiting for some response from him, and while she waited, regarding the great man quizzically, her head—her great blonde fine head—on one side pityingly; after watching him playing the piano for a moment or two without even looking up:

'You haven't forgotten tomorrow, I suppose?'



His forgetting of everything and anything connected with their private life was the one thing, she had lately confided to Eldrich when he was at home, that now kept them in touch. If it weren't for having sometimes to remind him of things, she wondered what call she might ever have for descending to his floor nowadays. For they had not merely their separate rooms but positively their separate floor by this time.

'Tomorrow?' He went on playing. The handsome, easily tragic, public face assumed its expression of tired aggrievance.

'Yes, tomorrow. You have an engagement.'

'Tomorrow, tomorrow, engagements, engagements. Nothing but engagements.' He banged down the lid of the piano and the overtones sang on as he passed his hand wearily across his eyes in a gesture of infinitely over-harassed preoccupation. Like all his tricks, his poses, his gestures that she flattered herself she knew as well as he did, this simply made her smile without speaking.

'Tomorrow's Thursday. Let me see—matinée as usual. Oh yes, of course, there's some big-wig coming. Do you want a seat?'

'Tomorrow was the day', she remained absolutely calm, 'that we were going to watch Eldrich play.'

He slapped his thigh, quite genuinely upset. 'Damn it, I forgot all about it. Why on earth didn't you remind me before. And now I don't see how I can manage it.'

Before she decisively closed the door, she gave him one look.

'You're a wonderful father, I must say.'

## II

She didn't conceal from herself that as far as she was concerned Rankin's forgetfulness had its compensations. She had the visit all to herself and, having been brought up among a host of brothers, she was able to participate in all the pleasures of it. Had Rankin been there, she would have been largely taken up with being the famous man's wife: indeed, half the interest of the whole thing would have been dispersed by the focusing of attention inwards on his famous, much-photographed profile. Without him she would give herself up to the intensities of Eldrich's own drama and his excitement that she could so readily catch. He only had time for the scrappiest of conversations before dashing off to change; but the vividness of his feeling even then was high enough to communicate itself across to her. On her own account,

too, she responded vividly to the scene. The brand new chalk lines down the freshly rolled field, the flags fluttering, the nervous pitch she could sense in the knots of boys adjusting boots or wiping hands on thighs, the arrival of the referee with his blazer and his whistle and his long blast to gather them together, the stripping of scarves and sweaters, the trotting out into position, the flexing of knees and the swinging of arms, the short still moment of crouching before it began, the young captain's shout and the kick-off high into the air. It was a game that she adored. There was nothing for her more exhilarating than to watch these young rams butting each other with all the ferocity of full-grown bulls. She had picked up, too, from her brothers, an appreciation of the finer points of the game. It had been raining that morning and the ground was still wet, though drying in a stiff breeze. The ball would be difficult to handle: it would be, in the first half at least, a forward's game and the school was playing against the wind. Eldrich, at fly-half, was a shade small and light. The opposing pack was the heavier and under the shrewd orders of their captain kept the ball in, wheeled and broke in long, dangerous dribbling rushes, difficult to check. It was largely owing to the dogged 'guts' of the school's squat red-haired scrum-half that the score was kept down below double figures. Time and again they were held by his dropping down on the ball, making nothing of the increasingly rough treatment he provoked as the opposing forwards were time and again frustrated. He was the centre of resistance; and Eldrich's housemaster with whom she was standing loudly acclaimed him. He was one of those middle-aged spectators who are uncontrollable at a game; he kept up an unceasing clamour of advice. 'Fall on the ball! Fall on it!' and 'Oh, well done, man, well *done*! Get round behind him, Jeffries, Minchin round *behind*, man, heads down and shove, shove. Oh well *done*, well fallen.'

It was a little disappointing that Eldrich with so many chances didn't once, Elva noticed, earn his housemaster's praise. He noticeably didn't fall; he always tried the alternative method, less painful and flashier if it came off, of running across the face of the dribble to pick the ball up from off their feet. Fundamentally unsound, with a greasy ball it was fatal. There was only the one way, as the scrum-half knew and as she herself knew. Major Jenkins left no one in doubt, stamping down with his stick on the ground

and letting out anguished cries: 'No, No, fall on it, man, fall! fall!! fall!!!' as Eldrich, skimming sideways, tried to scoop up the ball and only succeeded in conceding another 'knock-on'.

It rather clouded her chat in the interval with the Major, a man of simple and direct enthusiasms who, before the game, had been praising her boy to her in terms she very much liked. 'A promising lad,' he had said. 'It wouldn't surprise me, Mrs. Rankin, if he turns out to be one of our best.' Now it was a different story. 'I wish that young beggar of yours would learn to fall on the ball.' He went off, shaking his head, to give detailed advice to the muddy circle of players sucking their lemons in the centre of the ground.

Meanwhile the sun had come out and the ground was rapidly drying; in the second half the nature of the game altered and the school forwards with the wind behind them now got a fair share of the ball. They were a good pack who heeled cleanly and gave the outsiders a chance: and here the school had a clear superiority. Eldrich had a good pair of hands and an eye for an opening and he worked in well with his scrum-half. The school drew level with three quick tries, none of them converted and then, while they still had the impetus, in the enemy's twenty-five Eldrich sold his opponent a perfect dummy and went through between the posts. The conversion put them five points up and they clung to the lead. Though the enemy got one other try, it was far out by the touch line and when the final whistle went, the school side had won by the extra two points. The major's equanimity was quite restored; as he shook hands with Eldrich's mother he didn't mind admitting to her that he already had the boy in mind for a perfect one day. But for her it wasn't quite so simple. She couldn't get out of her mind the two pictures, one of the stocky scrum-half in the close-in mêlée of the forward game repeatedly throwing his body at the forward's boots: he was—a real little *man*; the other was of Eldrich in the open field selling his dummy to the general applause: he was—the son of his father.

Perhaps even Eldrich felt it a little as afterwards they ate scrambled eggs and cakes at the local Victoria Café. Certainly he was a little 'down', and his tone in regretting that his father hadn't come was distinctly wistful. It was then that she had had her idea and had switched the conversation to plans for his half-term leave. She turned over one or two possibilities, climbing in



Wales or riding in the New Forest, before she put the suggestion to him:

'Rankin has something rather special on that Saturday: they've restored an Elizabethan theatre. He's to make a speech and do the last two acts of Macbeth. How would you like us to put in an appearance?'

Whatever clouds there had been before disappeared at that, though it was only subsequently, in going over the whole thing, that she asked herself whether even then there hadn't been more enthusiasm and less irony than usual in his whole-hearted:

'Yes. Let's.'

### III

The reopening of the Mermaid Theatre was an English occasion. A minor Royal Personage arrived in a Daimler. The Mayor and his aldermen did their best to dignify the centre of the picture but somehow were always edged out by the quiet distinction of the Peer who had from London created the fund that was putting them unexpectedly in the limelight. It was to him rather than to them that the local notabilities gravitated, when it wasn't, as Elva noticed, to Rankin. Most of the crowd that gathered had come for the experience of seeing *him* in the flesh: and it was on occasions such as this that he was at his most brilliant best. Modest but striking, charming but visibly great, he had, she couldn't deny, the happiest knack of enchanting an audience, by treating them as equals, by raising them to the level of his own enthusiasm. For he did really care. The Mayor was facetious and fumbling in introducing the Royalty who herself was official and formal. The distinguished Peer was inclined to be portentous and talked from above to below. It was only when Rankin, the last speaker, got up that the thing became alive; it wasn't, either, only by means of the tricks of his charm that he did it—the carefully studied and rehearsed technique for putting himself across. They were there, of course, and they were used. Every one of them she knew in its smallest detail. She felt she could have predicted to the last inflection and the least movement what effects he was to produce. As she sat among the distinguished visitors in the front row she was playing all the time with Eldrich her favourite game of numbering them off and anticipating their results, and even at the more outrageous of his devices, nudging her companion's knee.

He was appealing for money and he was throwing himself

completely into the part of a beggar. He wasn't one of those actors who are too anxious to be thought gentlemen to let themselves go. He conducted an auction; and the public, to whom he was only known as a tragedian, were delighted to discover his gift for the comic. 'Pure music hall!' Elva may have been whispering to Eldrich, but that didn't account for the brilliance with which he did it. They ate, as they say, out of his hand; he came down into the auditorium stuffing into bulging pockets the cheques and bank notes that they fell over one another to pass over to him.

To the storm of applause that finished this part of the performance Eldrich's hands contributed a full share, and the unself-conscious smile with which he turned to her seemed almost menacingly proprietary. Her customary 'Wonderful, isn't it?' that meant between them so much, so much of reservation, of ironic surprise at *his* getting away with it yet again was met this time—or was it only the first time she had noticed it?—with an open-hearted response, 'He's wonderful, isn't he?'

In the interval which was then planned to give the actors time to dress, congratulations flowed in to them across the teacups and the cakes, and when they became separated she couldn't in spite of several attempts succeed in catching Eldrich's eye. She began to worry. She couldn't help observing with what shining eyes he listened to the praise that was pouring in. Where was that little distance, she found herself wondering, that little space which they had always managed to keep clear round themselves, to prevent their being stifled by the pressure of flattery? It was either that or they were done, the boy especially—she had long since decided that; and the fear touched her in passing that Eldrich was now going under.

This sense, the uneasy sense of a situation slipping dangerously towards some impossible line, became increasingly pronounced as the afternoon advanced. She became positively impatient with Eldrich. Naturally Rankin was brilliant in the acts which followed. It had always gone without saying. Then why did Eldrich find it necessary to say it now, to keep on saying it, and to say it with those ingenuous doelike eyes of his wide with innocent enthusiasm. She found it almost insufferable. If the boy hadn't learnt by now, after all she had done to prepare him for it, when was he going to learn? Was he going to turn out, above all dreadful things, to be simply as willing a victim as all the others?

But she came to the conclusion as soon as the play was over, when they had gone round to Rankin's dressing room and then taken a taxi together to the station and found their compartment on the special train, that she wasn't being fair to the boy. He *was* only a boy and Rankin—it must be admitted—was fiendishly good at his job. He had had a moment when they first joined him in his dressing-room of seeming to be surprised at the boy's genuinely blustering enthusiasm before he settled himself down into the father's role and played it—that again she had to admit—with a subtlety that no other living actor could have managed. His wasn't a mere impersonation of the conventional version of a father: he *was* a father. How could Eldrich, who hadn't, as she had, lived beside every change of intonation for sixteen years, be expected to discriminate? He only—when she came down to it—said her word for it. But even while she defended him there remained a bitter taste. He only had her word for it—but wasn't that enough? Apparently it wasn't, for Eldrich, open mouthed, drank in the answers which his father was readily and patiently giving to the hundred and one questions which the son now rained off, as if he had been starved of asking them for years. He wanted to know all about the mechanics of production, the technique of acting, how you remembered your part, the business of make-up. And to the simplicity of the questions Rankin responded carefully, as accurately, as fully, as amusingly, as if his interlocutor were a serious student or a famous critic. Certainly he had never, in a career filled with triumphs, had so absorbed an audience. Elva put it to herself, as they moved up the corridor to the dining car, that never had an audience been more at his mercy.

For the first time that she had ever seen it Rankin was positively perfunctory with the notables at the other tables; he was too absorbed in his own performance in which he had now, she noticed, shifted the stress. He was now—to perfection still—playing the perfect listener, drawing Eldrich out about his school life. She had certainly never heard the boy talk more freely; she had thought their own companionship an absolutely unreserved one, yet she found that she had never been given the confidences Rankin was succeeding in eliciting. Names of boys and stories about masters, incidents, opinions, even speculations, these in their close communion of shared smiles and small understandings had simply never come up. It cost her a pang now to hear them

tumbling out at the first friendly smile from *him*. Yet even while she put it to herself like that she found that, to be fair—and she was fair by nature—the situation before her very eyes was moving into reverse.

Eldrich was telling his father about his rugger, describing the Colts games and the part he had played in them. When he came to the last one, the one she had watched, she observed that he became more hesitant than he had been before; the flow of unselfconscious talk faltered as if, perhaps, he suddenly became aware that he might not here, unless he was careful, be able to count so surely on his father's good will. He didn't stop, but he began to be evasive, to feel his way, to grope. And she noticed, too, how Rankin, with his acute talent, picked up at once the fumble and eased the boy's way.

'I didn't enjoy it so much. It somehow went wrong . . . ' Eldrich hesitantly began. 'It was one of those wet days to begin with . . . '

'I know them', Rankin said easily; 'the ball like a greased plate and no grip in your fingers. First one "knock-on" and then another. And then from bad to worse.'

'That's just it.' Eldrich's surprised pleasure at his father's sympathy and the renewed confidence which followed from it, seemed to Elva almost perverse. Didn't she, anyhow, appreciate these niceties just as well as Rankin did?

'We got nothing of the ball to start with. It was just forwards' rushes all the time and they were a beastly heavy lot.' Then he added tentatively, 'I don't think I'm much good at that kind of game'. It was, as Elva saw, a crucial moment. It even held Rankin up for a moment: he filled in the interval by preparing a pipe, a property that she had often noticed him carrying, though she had never seen him complete the 'business' by smoking it.

'Perhaps it isn't only a question just of their weight,' Rankin proceeded to treat the boy as a man of the world. 'Isn't it also their hidden hate? They despise us outsiders as a spectacular sort of fly-by-nights—exhibitionists—actors—'. Father and son exchanged here a smile of shared confidence—'just as we regard them as clumsy sorts of navvies, there only to do the heavy work while we do the skilled'.

The boy evidently from his laugh recognized this feeling but



brought up another difficulty. 'That only makes it all the harder, though. You know they're out to get their own back.'

'True. But you know the trick, don't you?'

'I don't think so.'

'Oh it's easy enough. It's no good just dropping and lying there to be kicked like some of those scrum-halves. I was given the tip by Cheesman—England's five caps in '12 and '13. Hunch your shoulders, tuck in your head and launch the ram straight at their shins. Bring 'em off their feet. They can't kick you when they're on their backs. Straight for their shins with your shoulder, gather the ball as you go, crooked under the arm like this. Got it? Over they go and you're through the wave and out the other side—with the ball as well.'

The boy listened with the closest absorption; and there were a hundred things that followed from this, technical points, that he made his father explain—did you do it like this or like that? And that about the tackle—at the knees or the ankles? He never seemed to get his hand-off quite right; was there something special to look for there—until presently he was pulling out his crested fixture and saying: 'You know, you simply must come down and catch the next one. Really you must.' Rankin, charmed with his enthusiasm, produced his engagement book and turned the pages with an indulgent smile.

They neither of them noticed Elva's getting up; they hardly heard her plea of train-sickness. She couldn't bear another moment of it. The situation she had feared would have been bad enough. She had been preparing all Eldrich's life against that, against the danger from Rankin's charm and his ferocious skill: a defenceless boy could so easily be seduced by them. But the situation in reverse was simply not to be borne. For what had become overwhelmingly clear to her as they compared their calendars across the table was just that it was the boy now who was out to seduce him.

The last thing she heard—and as she pushed her way down the corridor it echoed in her head as a final confirmation of the injustice of her whole situation—was Rankin saying: 'Yes, it was damned annoying about that. Your mother should really have reminded me.'

J. P. HODIN  
MEMORIES  
OF FRANZ KAFKA

Notes for a definite biography, together with reflections  
on the problem of decadence.

I

The true speakers are dead cracked in the valley of hate.

SYDNEY KEYES: *The Message*

As the chief criterion of the value of a work of art in our time, the personal touch is demanded. That has led to the exaltation of individualism, which in its turn has resulted in the isolation of the artist and the growth of an esoteric, intellectual art. The generation which made an onslaught upon prejudices of every sort, whether social, political, religious or sexual, was capable of destroying but not of building anew. It was necessarily negative, torn, and restless. When Joyce's *Ulysses* appeared, it had on literature an influence like that of the splitting of the atom in physics. A world collapsed, became rubble. The young generation wandered, astray, among the ruins, filled with the lust of self-destruction. The artist of our time treats his object 'as a surgeon dissects a corpse' (Apollinaire on Picasso). *Dehumanización del arte!* Everything trivial was destroyed, but together with it everything that was vital. Today the mask of nihilism stares at us out of the midst of it. Today, surrounded by a civilization which in reality is smashed to pieces, and with the pale remnants of a conception of the world in our hearts, we long for an architecture of the soul. We no longer believe that 'the only true artists are those who wish to become inhuman'. We clearly see that the analytical mind is the antipode of the creative mind. We long for communion with creation. We do not want to be diverted from it by the modern sorcery of supposedly scientific thinking stamped out by the machine age to a pattern of misunderstood and misdirected psychology. The revolt of man against the divine (for one of man's ideas of God had once more begun to totter) is over—for our time. By following in the footsteps of surrealism we can only arrive at the mad-house. A philosophy revolving about the

splitting of the atom is not a programme. Cubism was cold speculation. (Of use as a negative programme, but insufficient as a positive one.) Today we see too that Franz Kafka, even though he never believed in a purely rational conception of the material world, yet, because he gave a new interpretation of the spiritual forces, the divinely destined aspect of life, to which he as a man of the East owed allegiance and gave it a subjective and pessimistic character, can be of no help to us in our search for harmony and the re-shaping of the soul. He belongs to the grave-diggers. The sombre despair, the lack of any hope or comfort, which speaks to us from his work, the fear-complexes and persecution-mania, the monotony of seeing no way out, its morbid and decadent quality, prevent many of us from enjoying his extraordinary imagination and stylistic power. Today (in view of the bewildering of the times, the thirst for a credo that would unite us all, for an all-embracing, unified picture of life) it cannot be the distinguishing quality of great literature for a writer to project his personal negative problems into the infinite and so cause us to despair with him.

How the conception of the decadent has changed in the last decades! For Nietzsche 'decadent' meant critical man, as opposed to creative man, 'Christian' man as opposed to the Greek. We called J. P. Jacobsen, Herman Bang, R. M. Rilke, Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Oscar Wilde, Hermann Hesse, Marcel Proust and the Knut Hamsun of the Mysteries decadent. It was a romantic, melancholic weariness of life, reflected splendour of the chronic *Weltschmerz*, which Leopardi described as in some sort the 'noblest feeling of man, which cannot be satisfied by any earthly thing or the whole world of phenomena', and in which we saw the chief sign of the greatness of our nature. For Sören Kierkegaard the characteristic of the great man lay in distress, torment and paradox. The next stage was to seek the sole sources of the spiritual in disease, in misfortune and in madness. ('The blunder type of people are all mentally ill nowadays. Only the mediocre and the untalented are capable of heartily enjoying life.' Dostoevsky: *A Raw Youth*.) From there it was only a short step to the intensification of the experience of the negative, in which negation became an end in itself and assumed the value of the absolute. Yet here it is that the revolt starts against the essence of life itself. Behind Franz Kafka's metaphysical fear one can feel

the revenge of the despairing, the rebellion, driving right into the midst of the Absolute, against the logic of creation, against a performance in which man seems to be nothing but a bad joke on the part of Providence. It is the most consistent bedazzlement, much more subtle than Baudelaire's Satanism or Heidegger's and Spengler's pessimism or Sartre's *Néant*. (How different in character is the tragic conflict between man and destiny in Greek drama, how great the Promethean idea.) The present process is one of self-dissolution, which finds in the unbridgeable dualism of divine and human truth the knife under which man must die 'like a dog'.

One can be just to Kafka only by making a distinction between his world of ideas, which arises out of his father-complex, tuberculosis, inability to free himself from a hated milieu, depressions, etc., and flourishes on the ground of a religion of despair and negation, and his creative power as an artist. One can reject the one and admire the other, even though we must never forget that creative form is, after all, ultimately something very personal, dependent on its thought-content and thus not transmissible. Here it must be said at once: Kafka's time has yet to come, in an artistic sense, when the problems in his work will no longer burn the living flesh, when one will be able to read him in the way we today read the masters of adolescent melancholy, an Amiel, a Gerard de Nerval.

Kafka's artistic merits are fully recognized. He moved from a symbolic way of writing ('An old man, naked, exposed to the chill of this unhappy age, I drive around in an earthly carriage, with unearthly horses'. *A Country Doctor*) to a surreal realism, of which the characteristic is that the earthly and the supernatural interpenetrate each other and become a unity. It is not a matter of allegories, but of the realism of a man who, with his whole being, feels that there is not only a human standpoint but also a standpoint of 'God', and that man in reality undergoes a 'trial', while he believes that he is simply 'living'. Dante's visions, so far as we are concerned, take place outside the real world. Don Quixote is an example of the interpenetration of two worlds. But there two 'human' worlds are involved, that of idealism (of a lunatic illusion or of an idea that is no longer historically valid) and that of reality. In Kafka's case it is the interpenetration in reality of a human world and a divine one which is hostile to



im. To the question whether there is any hope outside this world, since life in this world seems to be without hope, Kafka answers: 'Plenty of hope—for God—an infinite amount of hope—only it is not for us'. That is the basic note of his whole work. Kafka stands on the shadow side of life. And yet he revered Goethe. In his striving, in the overcoming of difficulties, in creation beyond the limits of his own personality, Goethe found the meaning of human life, he found salvation. In Kafka we meet the image of a doorkeeper who guards the 'doors of the law' and admits nobody. The man who longs for admittance spends his whole life patiently waiting, only in the end to hear the answer to his last, feeble question: 'Nobody else could be admitted here, for this door was meant only for you. And now I go and lock it up.' In Goethe we find a drive towards activity, towards renewal, towards health; there is the urge to unite opposites into a higher unity. In Kafka everything has a negative relation to life, passive and broken. The petitioner is not admitted by the doorkeeper, the surveyor never catches sight of the inhabitants of the 'castle', in *The Trial* undergoes trial by ordeal (consciousness of guilt, original sin, court of judgement), he is changed into a bug (*The Metamorphosis*), he humiliates himself into the existence of a mole, suffering agonies of fear and suspense in his burrow under the earth (*The Burrow*). The nightmare sense of inferiority towards a fatal and despotic father, who nearly crushes him, the hatred of petit-bourgeois life, against a job that is slowly killing him, and his weakness of will, show clearly the basic mistake of calling *The Castle* Kafka's *Faust*. If Dante had emphasized only the negative side of his restless life, he would never have become the author of the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*. Did not Proust bring works of a fragrant beauty from his sick-room? The overcoming of human inadequacy, the recognition of a cosmos and a significant order and harmony which prevails in spite of all suffering, is the mark of great and powerful minds. In Kafka's work everything remains dark as the darkest Middle Ages, the most refined self-torture and self-irony. That is why we can contribute so little towards a return to health in our time.

It will be objected that the value of a work of art does not consist of its moral or 'hygienic' function, that it is the product of a pure process of creation, and so on. This attitude dominated

for a long time and could not fail, *eo ipso*, to lead to nihilism. For art is not only form; form should not live at the expense of the idea. In the views quoted here the moral side of the question, in any case, is not decisive. It is a mere expression of indignation against all that is non-vital, against the deification of the neurotic, the inability to face life, of those who are weakened and worn out by doubts and scepticism and who have been made the fetish of the time. We find that such an attitude cannot be maintained after the Second World War and its horrors which are more ghastly than any surrealist could imagine. Are we wrong in saying that Kafka himself would not have wished to be canonized by decadent intellectuals, for whom thinking is nothing but acrobatics and an end in itself?

Kleist, who put an early end to his life by suicide and whom Kafka greatly revered, created in *Michael Kohlhaas* one of the most forceful literary documents of the fight for right and security, a perfect work of art. Heine drew his 'little songs' from his 'great sufferings'. And Dostoevsky, with whose subtle psychology Kafka has so much in common? And Beethoven? And Michelangelo? In the work of art the trials of life are molten down into the gold of the beautiful, the imperishable; the personal element fades into the background. But with Kafka one feels that the personal element poisons his art. That too is the reason for his destructive urge towards his own work. Therein lies the great ethos of his personality. The message which Kafka, with his great gifts, could have brought to humanity, he never did bring. With all feeling and sympathy for his tragic fate, his psychic and physical sufferings, a work which has been written for the purpose of fighting off overpowering complexes, fails to produce the catharsis which is the indubitable sign of every great work of art.

To arrive at a clear judgement of Kafka's work means becoming aware of the greatest deficiency of our epoch. Our time calls for spiritual leadership, not for literature. All humanity's strength, self-confidence and ability to suffer are needed to achieve the Herculean task of lifting life out of chaos into the light. How much love, kindness and faith, how much trust and wisdom we need for that task! What are we to make of a man whom fear has lowered to the state of animal-existence and who says of himself: 'Inside my hill of earth I can of course dream of

everything, even of reconciliation, although I know definitely that all that doesn't exist at all . . . ?

It is better to say, as André Gide said to Nathanael: '*Tu ne t'étonnes peut-être pas assez de vivre . . .*', Gide whose whole work expounds the view 'that the kingdom of Heaven will not be given to us by grace but will have to be sought and conquered: *Paradis est toujours à refaire*'.

## II

We are nihilistic ideas born in God's head.—FRANZ KAFKA.

In order to understand the inquisitorial determinism of Kafka's work; one has to take into account the time in which it came into existence and the ground on which it grew. Of the time it is enough to say it was the pre-war and post-war age. But the ground, Prague, the city where East and West interpenetrate and races mingle, the place where peoples and civilizations have met and influenced each other, centuries of history pervading narrow streets like an intolerable burden, and in the lamp-light by night the Latin thoughts of the Age of Enlightenment fight duels with the sombre world of Dostoevsky's ideas, where religious feuds cast their bloody shadows, and Slavonic melancholy, Jewish Talmudism, Catholic mysticism, Hussite puritanism, carved their lines in the people's faces—only in Prague could fantasies like Kafka's come into existence. Kafka's flight from his parents' house is at the same time a flight from Prague, flight from the weight of tradition, flight from the multitude of tongues into the unequivocal. An analysis of Kafka's work is not complete unless it takes into account the poetic and tormenting influence of Prague.

What follows shows how Kafka's fate and his work are reflected in the mind of an artist who grew up in the same environment as himself.

The painter F. Feigl, now living in England, gave me these reminiscences: 'It was in the year 1894. Kafka and I went to school together. It was the Altstädter Deutsche Gymnasium. He was about ten years old, a thin, frail boy with very big, black eyes, a long skull and pointed ears which gave him a degenerate look. The reason why I remember him so clearly is that his mother

always came to fetch him after school, which struck us other children as strange.

‘Then I lost sight of him. It was not till 1907 that I heard of him again. In the circle of the group of modern painters known in Prague as “The Eight”, Max Brod mentioned during a discussion: “I can tell you the name of a very great artist—Franz Kafka.” And he showed us some drawings of his, which evoked the memory of early Paul Klee or Kubin. They were expressionistic. Kafka did not develop his gift for drawing any further. The elocutionist Ludwig Hart told me once: “Do you realize that Franz Kafka is the greatest writer of Prague?” At that time Rilke was no longer in Prague and Werfel had settled down in Vienna. Then we struck up a friendship, Kafka and I. Kafka was associated with a group of writers who used to read their work to each other. I remember hearing Kafka there when he read his sketch “The Scuttle-Rider”. The background of this story is the shortage of coal after the First World War. A man rides through the air on a coal-scuttle, to the coal-merchant’s. It is like things of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s, only less mystical. It made more the impression of something humorous and grotesque. Kafka read it with right feeling for the fine points and in a boyish voice. Boyishness—that is the characteristic that clung to him all his life.

‘Later in Berlin he once introduced me to his fiancée. He had an “eternal” fiancée and always said he was not worthy of her. Behind things like these there is hidden a sexual development that is by no means normal. I believe Kafka was afraid of bodily contact. He hated reality. He avenged himself on the causality of the world with a microscopically sharp analytical method. Under the microscope the causality of everyday life becomes a drama. Dimensions lose their sense, because they look quite different under the magnifying-glass from what they are to the naked eye. He makes the events of a story into a novel. His sentences have beauty and order because they are built up on a long-term policy. That was necessary, because his thoughts had a complicated causal nexus. It made him creative in his use of language, just as he was in the analysis of the soul. One could call his writing psycho-analytical, and now it is exploited by people who visualize nothing and so reduce it *ad absurdum*. For it all depends, after all, on what one finds under the microscope.

‘Kafka’s life was like one of his novels. This lonely man, who



had a longing for the romantic—I remember him living for some time in one of the little houses in the Alchimistengasse in Prague—had to work in an insurance company, for a small salary, with slow promotion every five years. He had a tyrannical father, who forced him to lead a dull and sober life, and with whom he had nothing in common. When we met—we used to go for long walks together—he was very eager to get to know something about the other arts. Once we tried to analyse the elements of art. That was about five years before his death. We came to the conclusion that the essential of painting was space, of music time, and of writing causality. That corresponds to the basic elements of sensual perception: spatial, temporal and causal. Then I realized for the first time that his way of writing expressed a new causality, a new causal connexion. Kafka did not talk of that again.

‘Once I had a discussion about him with Max Brod, who was his squire and herald. For me the interesting question was how far one can go in this displacement of causality. Then I classified Kafka as a romantic. Brod protested against that and said it was a mitigation. For me it does not imply a judgement of values.

‘To simplify into microscopic or over-life-size terms was typically continental and basically “baroque”. We use a baroque and almost grotesque scale whenever we think of Prague, that fantastic city. Everything fantastic always had a great appeal for the people of Prague. If someone cannot get any coal, it becomes a tragic experience. The “ride” is an idea realized in visual terms.

‘I believe I understood Kafka, but he was shy of letting anyone really get to know him. If I recall today the type to which he belonged, picture how he used to move and what he used to do, understand him better still. Even at that time I assumed that his way of writing was a self-sufficient relief for him. He needed no one else for confirmation. Marriage with a woman, the relationship of author and public, these are realities. He defended himself against reality, creating for himself a reality of his own, in which he took revenge on the apparent senselessness and injustice of reality by caricaturing it.

‘I met Kafka again in Berlin. We often spoke of the same questions. At that time he bought a picture of mine, a Prague study. There was a touch of Munch about it, something uncanny. I once found Prague an uncanny experience, when returning from

rationalistic Germany. It was characteristic of him to choose precisely this picture. He seems to have had the typical mixture of hate and love for Prague. He gave the picture to his fiancée.

'Then I suddenly heard that he had died of tuberculosis of the larynx. Fundamentally Kafka remained a boy, to whom it was not granted to grow old. He died in the midst of his youth, while he still faced life with all the curiosity of a child, in spite of the fact that he was over forty.

'Concerning the characteristics of Kafka's work I should like to say that it shows all the signs of a deformed imagination. The deformed comic in a circus, the clown, has a nose that is too long or feet that are too big. All grotesqueness contains the comic element of deformity. Kafka's art was tragic in its deformity, because he put the negative and tormenting aspect of life into the foreground. All his work is like a nightmare; what is typical of it is this dream-like, nightmarish quality.

'Every artist moves between extremes. Yet every liberty has its limits. Cézanne approaches the banal when he paints apples in monumental fashion. Only art-historians and art-dealers, who make a living by it, see things differently. But artists recognize it as the failings of a genius. Even in Prague I felt the torturing quality of Kafka's art. Still more today, when we have to find the decisive ethical standpoint in life. Everything that only underlines egotism, everything merely subjective—the asocial approach gives the impression of genius, but it remains asocial—is of an unhealthy influence. It ran wild in politics, almost like futurism. The whole era was ripe for such ideas, which brought it to the edge of the abyss in politics and in an evolutionary sense to the atomic bomb and to the triumph of analysis. Analysis is a great poison. It is a rhythm of corrosion, a rhythm of the brain.

'True art is always synthesis. Kafka's mind was basically corrosive and analytic. Why is analysis as an end in itself not a mark of genius? Because it has no real content. It has no real meaning. Analysis pretends to be both content and form. Kafka's object was nothing, it was nothingness; he analysed analysis. It was exactly the same in cubism and in surrealism. When they had split up the whole into its elements and finally declared form to be the meaning, these were only human, egocentric delusions. But there one can see how movements come into existence. The surrealists are imitated, Kafka is imitated. Brueghel's picture comes

into my mind: the blind men, who are guided by a blind man, all fall into the ditch. The less one can see, the more convulsively one clings to a coat-tail.

'About Kafka I should say that he was honest and did not care about worldly success. He did not want to be praised, and we do not want to find fault with him. What I have said was only to point out his characteristics. The forces of which one gains possession, through analysis, can after all lead to good as well. The artist, too, must be a "critic". The goal appears to me to be a life in which pulses the life-blood of a unified ethical idea. We are still remote from it.'

### III

When I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because however much a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea moreover, though a wise man think to know, yet shall he not be able to find it. *Ecclesiastes*

Some deny misery by pointing at the sun; he denies the sun by pointing at misery.

FRANZ KAFKA

In July 1923 Kafka left Prague. He settled down in Berlin, determined never to return to his parents' house and to devote himself entirely to writing. It was then that he met the woman with whom he founded a home for the short time that he still had to live.

I have spent many hours with Mrs. Dora Dymant, talking about Kafka and those last months of his life. I am indebted to her for all that she told me so simply, warmly and candidly. Before I begin to quote it, it must first be said, as she herself emphasized: I am not objective, I cannot be. It is more than twenty years since Kafka went. But after all, one can only measure time by the importance of one's experiences. Even today it is often difficult for me to talk about Kafka. Frequently it is not the facts which are decisive, it is a mere matter of atmosphere. What I tell has an inner truth. Subjectivity is part of it.

'I met Kafka for the first time on the Baltic, in the summer of 1923. I was very young then, nineteen, and was working voluntarily in the holiday camp of a Berlin youth hostel, in Müritz, near Stettin. One day on the beach I saw a family playing—parents and two children. I was particularly struck by the man. I could not shake off the impression he made on me. I even followed them into the town, and later met them again. One day it was

announced in the hostel that Dr. Franz Kafka was coming to supper. At that time I was in charge of the kitchen. When I looked up from my work—the room had grown dark, someone was standing outside the window—I recognized the man from the beach. Then he came in—I didn't know then that it was Kafka, and the woman with whom he had been on the beach was his sister. He said in a soft voice: "Such tender hands, and such bloody work for them to do!" (Kafka was at that time a vegetarian.) In the evening we were all sitting on benches at long tables; a little boy got up and, as he went away, was so embarrassed that he fell down. Kafka said to him, his eyes shining with admiration: "What a clever way to fall and what a clever way to get up again!" When later I thought of these words again, their central meaning seemed to me to be that everything could be saved—except Kafka. Kafka could not be saved.

'He was tall and slim and dark skinned and had a loping walk that at first made me believe he must be a half-breed Indian and not a European. He swayed a little, but held himself straight. Only he carried his head a little on one side. That was typical of him. It expressed a relationship-symptom. Kafka had the bearing of the lonely man who is always in relation to something outside himself. It was not exactly a kind of listening; there was also something very affectionate about it. I should like to call it the symptom of a need for relations, which expressed something like this: "I on my own am nothing, I am only something when connected with the outer world". Why did Kafka make such a deep impression on me? I came from the East, a dark being full of dreams and premonitions, who might have sprung from a book of Dostoevsky's. I had heard so much of the West—knowledge, clarity, style of living—I came to Germany with a receptive soul, and it gave me much. But over and over again I had the feeling that the people there needed something which I could give them. After the catastrophe of the war everyone expected salvation through the intermediary of the East. But I had run away from the East, because I believed the light was in the West. Later I became less ambitious in my dreams: Europe was not what I had expected it to be, its people had no rest in their innermost being. They lacked something. In the East one knew what man was; perhaps one could not move so freely in society and could not express oneself so easily, but one did know the consciousness of the unity of man



and creation. When I saw Kafka for the first time, his image corresponded to my idea of man. But even Kafka turned to me attentively, as though expecting something from me.

‘The essential characteristics of his face were the very open, sometimes even wide-open eyes, whether he was talking or listening. They were not staring in horror, as it had been said of him; it was rather more an expression of astonishment. His eyes were brown and shy. When he spoke, they lit up; there was humour in them; but it was not so much irony as mischievousness—as if he knew of something that other people didn’t know. But he was entirely without solemnity. Generally he had a very lively way of talking, and he liked talking. His conversational style was full of imagery, like his writing. Sometimes one got the impression of a craftsmanlike satisfaction, when he succeeded in expressing well what he wanted to say. His wrists were very slender, and he had long, ethereal fingers, speaking fingers which took on shape while he was telling a story and accompanied what he said much more than the hands did. Later on we very often amused ourselves making shadows on the wall with our hands. He was extremely clever at it. Kafka was always cheerful. He liked to play; he was the born playmate, always ready for some mischief. I don’t think that depressions were a dominant characteristic of his, except before he began to write. They did not appear at regular intervals; usually there was a reason for them which could be traced. For instance, when he came back from town. Then he was often more than depressed; it was almost revolt. It was the time of the inflation. Kafka suffered badly under the conditions. He had a rigorous attitude towards himself. Whatever might happen around him, he had no right to shut himself off from it. So the way to town was always a kind of Golgotha for him. He almost broke down physically under it. He could stand in queues for hours, not only with the intention of buying something, but simply from the feeling: blood was flowing, and so his must flow, too. In this way he experienced communion with an unhappy people in an unhappy time. I can see it clearly as the theme of “The Trial”, where he condemns K., because he tried to shape his life differently from a life of crucifixion. But there is no life except in “crucifixion”, and nobody is acquitted by the highest court of all. That is my interpretation. “How can it ever become different?” he said to me at that time. There are Helferich,

Hilferding, Rathenau—but no help (Hilfe), no advice (Rat). He felt as if people did not dare to call things by their right names, as if they were trying to hide all tragedy behind fair words.

‘We lived in Steglitz, later in Zehlendorf, first in one room, then in two. The first lodgings we left because of the landlady. Kafka described her in “A Small Woman”: “Only out of disgust, out of a never-ceasing disgust that was her perpetual driving-power, did she occupy herself with me”—that was how he put it.

‘Kafka had to write; he had to, it was his life-breath. The days on which he wrote were the rhythm of this breath. If it is said of him that he wrote for a fortnight, that means he wrote for fourteen successive evenings or nights. Kafka used to walk around, heavily and uneasily, before he began to write. Then he spoke little, ate without appetite, took no interest in things, and was very sad. He wanted to be alone. In the beginning I didn’t understand that; later on I always felt when he was going to begin writing. At other times he showed a great intensity towards even the most ordinary things. But on such days that vanished completely. I can only differentiate between these days, in their various tensions, by comparing them to colours: purple, dark green, or blue days. Later on he liked me to stay in the room while he was writing. Once he started to write after supper. He wrote for a very long time, and I fell asleep on the sofa. The electric light was on. All at once he was sitting at my side: I woke up and looked at him. A palpable change was visible in his face. The traces of the spiritual tension were so obvious that they had changed the face utterly.

‘*The Burrow*, one of his last stories, was written in one night. It was in the winter; he began early in the evening and had finished by the morning. Then he worked on it again. He told me about it jokingly and seriously. This story was autobiographical. It must have been the foreboding of the return to his parents’ house, the end of freedom, which aroused this panic feeling of fear in him. He pointed out to me that I was the “citadel” in the burrow. He often read to me what he had written. He never analysed, never explained. Sometimes it sounded humorous to me, with a sort of self-mockery. Time and again he said: “Well, I wonder if I’ve escaped the ghosts?”

‘This was the name with which he summarized everything

that had tormented him before he came to Berlin. He was as though possessed by this idea; it was a kind of sullen obstinacy. He wanted to burn everything that he had written in order to free his soul from these "ghosts". I respected his wish, and when he lay ill, I burnt things of his before his eyes. What he really wanted to write was to come afterwards, only after he had gained his "liberty". Literature for him was something sacred, absolute, incorruptible, something great and pure. The literature of today is not what Kafka understood by literature. Kafka felt unsure of most things in life and expressed himself very cautiously. But when it was a matter of literature, he was unapproachable and knew no compromise. There he was concerned with the whole. He not only wanted to penetrate to the bottom of things. He was at the bottom. But where the solution of human confusion was in question, he would not have any half measures. He experienced life as a labyrinth; he could not see the solution. He never got further than despair. For him everything was interwoven with cosmic causality, even the most everyday things. One finds this feeling in the East too, a longing for the wholeness of life. In the East there are spiritual matters which have to be fulfilled unconditionally, or else one is unable to live. Kafka felt that. The West has forgotten it. And that is why God has abandoned it. That is why all those things could happen which we have experienced. Therein, so I believe, lies one of the reasons for the interest in Kafka. The consciousness that God has abandoned us.

'I have been reproached for having burnt some of what Kafka wrote. I was so young then, and young people live in the present and perhaps in the future too. After all, for him all that had been nothing but self-liberation! At that time he had no more respect, no more love for his father. He had already recognized him: the man who dominated through possessions and "possesses" even his family. Kafka was very bitter about his father, and time and again, with biting humour, he would tell the story of how he had dedicated a book to him, and when he wanted to present it to him, his father only said coldly: "Put it on the table beside my bed".'

'In Berlin Kafka believed that he had liberated himself from the tyranny of his past. But the earlier problems were too tightly bound up with his life. As soon as one touched even a single

string of it, all the others vibrated, too. His inner life was of unfathomable depth and unbearable. He did not really hate Prague. He spoke of Prague in the way a European speaks of Europe. What tormented Kafka most was the fear of becoming dependent on his parents. This dependence endangered the "burrow". Hence his thriftiness. He wanted to accustom himself to a spartan life. In Berlin he believed for a time in the possibility of saving his life, in a personal solution for the inner and outer confusion. He wanted to feel like an average human being, with only a few wishes and needs. We made so many plans. Once we talked about opening a small restaurant. He was to be the waiter. That meant seeing everything without being seen, being right in the midst of everyday life. Indeed, he did do it, in his own way.

'He attached great importance to being carefully dressed. He would have regarded it as a lack of courtesy to go somewhere without having his tie perfectly knotted. His suits were made by a first-class tailor and he always took a long time about dressing. It was not vanity. He looked into the mirror without complacency, quite critical and judicial. It was done in order not to offend the world.

'He liked to go shopping; he liked simple people. His appearance with the shopping-basket or the milk-can was a familiar sight in our neighbourhood. In the mornings he often went for a walk alone. His day was strictly planned, all with a view to his writing. On his walks he always took a note-book with him, or if he forgot it, he would buy one on the way. He loved Nature, although I never heard him say the word.

'Among the things of which he was particularly fond was his pocket-watch. When we got into trouble with our landlady about the electric light—for he often wrote all through the nights—I bought a paraffin lamp. He loved its soft, living light and always wanted to fill it up himself; he would play about with the wick and continually found new virtues in it. He did not take a kindly view of the telephone and was distressed when it rang. I always had to answer it. I think he did not feel quite comfortable about machines and mechanical things. He was very fond of my calendar, which had a proverb for every day. Later we had one each and on special occasions Kafka used to "consult the calendar". Once, when I was washing grapes—he was fond of eating grapes and pineapples—I broke the glass. Immediately he appeared



in the kitchen, holding the calendar in his hand, and said, wide-eyed: "One moment can ruin everything". Then he handed me the page. The truth sounded so trivial. He smiled.

'Although Kafka preferred to remain undisturbed, we often had visitors. I still remember Willi Haas, the editor of *Die Literarische Welt* and Rudolf Kayser of the *Neue Rundschau*. Once Werfel came to read to Kafka from his new book. They were together for a long time. Then I saw Werfel go away, weeping. When I entered the room, Kafka was sitting there completely shattered and he murmured to himself several times: "To think that anything so terrible has to be at all!" He was weeping, too. He had let Werfel go away without having been able to utter a single word about his book. Anyone who put himself into Kafka's hands either had the most encouraging experience or despaired. There was nothing in between. He had the same inexorable severity towards his own work. And although he never really believed that he had achieved what he wanted, I believe he never had the feeling that he was a dilettante.

'Kafka never made other people feel uneasy. He attracted everybody, and whoever came to him did so with a kind of solemnity. They walked as though on tip-toe or on soft carpets.

'We were generally alone, and he often used to read aloud to me from Grimms' and Andersen's fairy-tales or from E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*, or from Hebel's *Schatzkästlein*. There was the story of the miner's sweetheart who accompanied her lover to the pit and never saw him alive again. They brought the bodies out into the daylight, but her lover was not among them. Her life passed away; she grew grey and old. Then one day his body was found in a gallery, quite unharmed, preserved by the gases. She came and embraced her lover; she had waited for him all these years and now it was a wedding and a funeral in one. Kafka liked this story for its "wholeness". It was as natural as great things always are. And he loved Kleist. He was capable of reading his *Marquis von O* to me five or six times in succession. He also used to read to me from Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*. He, too, was moved by the love of everyday life that is described there. The chance to live the way he wanted made him enter into a concrete relationship towards home, money and family. In a non-bourgeois sense. I emphasize that because I remember how calmly

and objectively Kafka spoke to me about his former fiancée. She was an excellent girl, but utterly bourgeois. Kafka felt that marrying her would mean marrying the whole lie that was Europe. And then there was the fear that he would not find time for writing. On the other hand, his engagement was an attempt to acclimatize himself to middle-class life, and at the same time a sort of curiosity. Really he wanted to know everything and to find out about everything. A haemorrhage, connected with his tuberculosis, cleared away all his doubts.'

In young Dora Dymant Kafka experienced that deep-rootedness of the soul of Eastern man. In Western Europe recognition of the tragic situation of the time only rarely goes hand-in-hand with an affirmation of life. Cynicism and pessimism prevail. Martin Buber transmitted to the West the wisdom and cheerfulness of that East where Dora Dymant grew up, and this gift of hers enchanted him. He even wished to return there with her, in order to enter a community and to live a simple life in it. And that was the question to which he devoted himself in *The Castle*. He would have tried it anywhere, but in the West it was probably no longer possible. The problem of having 'no roots' has much deeper causes in Kafka than his biographer assumes.



Once I directed the conversation towards *The Burrow*, which shows man in his subterranean corridors as a sniffing animal possessed by fear. I pointed to *A Report for an Academy*, in which an ape is forced to become a 'human being'. ('Before that I had so many ways of escape, and now there are none left.') I pointed to the *Investigations of a Dog* and *The Giant Mole*. It is not horror that one experiences in reading them, not the satirical bitterness of Swift, it is not the poetic-moralizing intention one finds in the fables of Æsop or la Fontaine, nor are they socio-political views, as in the *Roman du Renard*, where the author is forced to show humans in animal guise—it is the intention of lowering human existence to the level of animal life, and it contains disgust. Kafka himself must have felt this disgust.

Dora Dymant said quietly: 'I, too, think *The Metamorphosis* is worse than *The Penal Settlement*'. ('Our verdict does not sound harsh. The commandment which the condemned man broke will be written on his body with the harrow.') All the 'animal' aspect

is shown against the background of a universal catastrophe, a cosmic misunderstanding, like the one that stares at us with glassy eyes out of *The Imperial Message*: 'The message has been sent out to you. You are there, and the message is there—only the communications are too complicated. There is no chance that the message will ever reach you.' If we compare that with the loving spirit of Saint Francis, who included even the animals in salvation, the deep communion of God, creation, and man that lies in Spinoza's 'Deus sive natura', and his gentle 'Amor Dei intellectu', we shall penetrate deeper into Kafka's way of thinking.



Kafka's human tragedy soon reached its end. At Christmas 1923 he caught a chill and was in bed for four weeks with pneumonia. At that time he read a great deal, and he was very busy with the proofs of *The Fasting Man*, which had just come.

Kafka did not recover. He knew how ill he was, and he had long wanted to die. An uncle, who was a doctor, came to take him to Prague. This illness was the last and final 'defeat' for Kafka. What went on in his mind then, Frau Dora Dymant has tried to reconstruct from what Kafka once said to her: 'Tearing himself away from Prague, was, even though very late, the great achievement in life without which one has no right to die. The return to his parents' house was the return to dilettantism in life. That particularly tortured Kafka; one could see it in the mental oppression which conquered him.

I stayed in Berlin. Kafka did not want me to come to Prague, to the house from which all his disasters had come. A part of his total complex was that he hated his father and felt guilty because of it! I assume that he often murdered him in his dreams. At that time I received daily letters from him. They were taken from me by the Gestapo, together with his diaries, and in spite of all attempts no one has succeeded in finding them again. There were about thirty-five letters. In one of them Kafka mentioned "technical errors" in the way man acts towards himself. He was then preoccupied with the question of Tolstoy's fight for his own liberation and discovered some "technical errors" in that. Another time he told me of a dream he had had. Highwaymen had fetched him from his Berlin lodgings, shut him up in a shed in some backyard and gagged him. "I know that I am lost, because

you can't find me." And then he suddenly hears that she is still in sight, he tries to tear himself free, thinks he is already free, and has even succeeded in pushing the gag out of his mouth. She only needed to hear his shout—but at this very moment it is discovered by the highwaymen and they gag him again.

'The uncanny thing about Kafka's mortal illness was its outbreak. I felt that he had brought it about by downright force. It was like a deliverance for him; the decision was taken out of his hands. Kafka positively welcomed the illness, even though in the last moments of his life he once more wished to live.

'He left Prague a sick man, but spiritually in good form. It was in a sanatorium in the Vienna Woods, where his sister had taken him, that I met him again. There for the first time tuberculosis of the larynx was diagnosed. Kafka was no longer permitted to speak, and so he wrote everything down: above all, the devastating effect Prague had had on him. He stayed there for three weeks. When the illness became worse, he was taken to a specialist in a hospital in Vienna. There he lay in a room together with many other gravely ill patients. Somebody died every night. He "told" me about it, pointing once to a bed that was empty. Another time he showed me a patient, a jolly man who walked about a lot, enjoyed eating and had a tube in his throat. He had a moustache and shining eyes. Kafka was very pleased that he had such a good appetite. The next day he pointed at his empty bed. Kafka was not shaken, but positively angry, as if he could not grasp that the man who had been so gay had had to die. I shall never forget his malicious, ironical smile.

'From the hospital Kafka was removed to a sanatorium in Klosterneuburg-Kierling, near Vienna. There he lived in a wonderful, permanently sunny room with a balcony! I stayed there with him, and later his friend Dr. Klopstock came. Kafka wrote some letters from this sanatorium: to his parents, to his brothers and sisters, and to Max Brod. The latter came to visit him, after he had given a reading in Vienna, in order not to let Kafka notice in what danger he knew him to be. When he was in the sanatorium, Kafka did no writing, except for the "Conversations" which must be in Dr. Klopstock's possession. He was correcting proofs the evening before he died. At four o'clock in the morning I called Dr. Klopstock, because Kafka had difficulty in breathing. Dr. Klopstock immediately recognized the crisis and wakened the



doctor, who put ice-bags on his throat. About noon the next day, Kafka died. It was the third of June, 1924.

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'Years later I often read Kafka's books, always with the memory of how he read aloud from them himself. Then I felt that the German language was a hindrance to me. German is too modern a language, too much of the present day. Kafka's whole world longs for an older language. It was an ancient consciousness in him, ancient things and ancient fear. His brain knew finer nuances than the modern brain is capable of grasping. He is as little the expression of an age as the expression of the fate of a race. Nor is it everyday life that his realism represents: it is an absolute, compressed logic, in which one can live for short moments only.'

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With these words Mrs. Dora Dymant closed her story. From the mantelpiece over the open fireplace, in a grey London house, Kafka's eyes looked searchingly into the darkening room out of the last photograph that he had had taken in Berlin, for his passport. They were the eyes of a man who saw the world as split by incurable schizophrenia, the opposing interests of God and man—reflecting in this way his own schizoid mentality. His negative *Weltanschauung* fed on an affirmation of life that could not be fulfilled; his personal dualism drove him into the blind alley of the despairing dualistic theology of this present time. The future belongs to a life-affirming monism, in whose rays man and creation will be reunited and an all-embracing ethos of reverence for life will ripen, like a sweet fruit out of the smoking blood of the generations.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

## VAN GOGH, THE SUICIDE PROVOKED BY SOCIETY

WE may talk about the good mental health of Van Gogh, who, during his whole life in this world we live in, burnt only one hand in addition to cutting off his left ear.

However heartbreaking it may appear, contemporary life preserves itself in its old atmosphere of lechery, anarchy, disorder, delirium, dissoluteness, chronic madness, bourgeois inertia, psychic anomaly (for it is not man but the world which has become abnormal), deliberate dishonesty, flagrant hypocrisy, sordid contempt of everything which shows distinction, laying claim to a whole order founded on the fulfilment of primitive injustice—an order of organized crime, in fact. Everything is going badly because at this moment the morbid conscience has an essential interest in not recovering from its own sickness. And so a vicious society has invented psychiatry to defend itself from the investigations of certain superior lucid minds whose intuitive powers were disturbing to it.

No, Van Gogh was not mad, but his paintings were Greek torches, atomic bombs whose angle of vision, in distinction to all the other paintings existing at the time, would have been capable of seriously upsetting the grub-like conformity of the Second Empire bourgeoisie and of the police spies of Thiers, Gambetta, Félix-Faure, as well as those of Napoleon III. For Van Gogh's painting does not attack a certain conformity of convention so much as the conformity of institutions. Institutions disintegrate on the social level; and medical science, by asserting Van Gogh's madness, shows itself to be an unserviceable, irresponsible corpse. Psychiatry, challenged by Van Gogh's lucidity at work, is no more than an outpost of gorillas, themselves obsessed and persecuted, who have only a ridiculous terminology to alleviate the most appalling states of anguish and human suffocation: a fitting product of their disreputable brains.

Van Gogh's body, free from all sin, was also free from that madness which is only induced by sin. And I do not believe in Catholic sin, but I do believe in erotic crime. It is precisely the world's geniuses and authentic lunatics in the asylums who are innocent of this crime; and if they are not, it is because they are not (authentically) lunatics.

And what is an authentic lunatic? He is a man who has preferred to become what is socially understood as mad rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honour. In its asylums, society has managed to strangle all those it has wished to rid itself of or to defend itself from, because they refused to make themselves accomplices to various flagrant dishonesties. For a lunatic is also a man whom society has not wished to listen to, and whom it is determined to prevent from uttering unbearable truths. But in such a case, internment is not its only weapon, and the social collectivity has other means to subdue those minds it wishes to suppress. Apart from the trifling influences of the small-town witch doctors, there are the vast onsets of world-wide spells, participated in from time to time by the totality of alarmed conscience. By these means the universal conscience, during a war, a revolution or a potential social upheaval, is called in question, interrogates itself and passes its judgements. It can also be provoked and brought out of itself in the case of certain sensational individual examples. There have been the unanimous outbreaks with regard to Baudelaire, Edgar Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hölderlin and Coleridge—and there has also been one about Van Gogh.

The few lucid, well-disposed people who have had to struggle on this earth, see themselves at certain hours of the day and night from the depths of various phases of authentic recollected nightmare, overwhelmed by the powerful suction of the formidable, tentacle-like oppression of a kind of civic bewitchment which soon openly expresses itself in the general conventions. In comparison with this universal filth, based on sex on one hand and on mass or some such other psychic ritual on the other, there is no madness in walking around at night in a hat fitted with twelve candles in order to paint a landscape on the spot. As for the burnt hand, that was pure and simple heroism. The cut-off ear was straightforward logic. I repeat: a world which every day and night increasingly eats the uneatable in order to adapt its bad faith

to its own ends is forced, as far as this bad faith is concerned, to keep it under lock and key.

★            ★            ★

I believe Gauguin thought the artist should look for the symbol and the myth and expand everything in life into a myth, whereas Van Gogh thought that we must know how to infer the myth from the most everyday things in life. For reality is greatly superior to every story, mythology, deity and super-reality. It is enough to have the genius to know how to interpret reality, which is something no painter had done before Van Gogh.

Van Gogh had reached that stage in illumination when thought flows back on itself in disorder.

It is the tendency of superior personalities, always one step beyond reality, to explain everything through their own bad conscience, to believe that nothing is ever due to chance, and that all the evil which occurs happens as a result of conscious, shrewd and deliberate bad will: an opinion which psychiatrists never hold and which geniuses always believe.

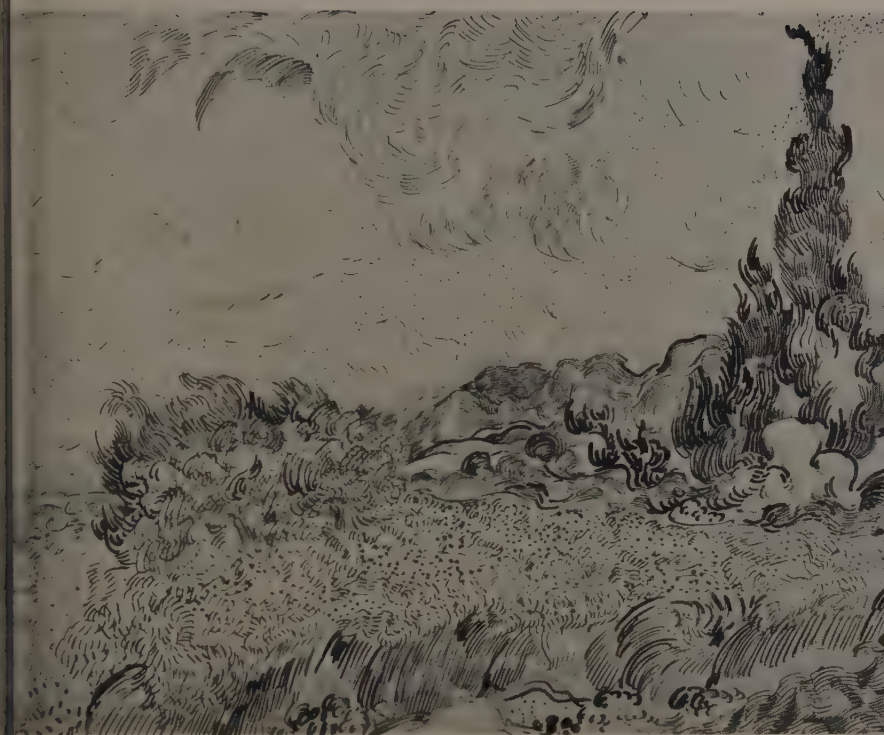
No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modelled, constructed, or invented anything, except in order to extricate himself from hell.

I will tell you that Van Gogh is a painter because he has re-assembled nature, because he has, as it were, perspired it and made it sweat, because he has spurted on to his canvases in heaps, monumental with colours, the centuries-old struggle of elements, the terrible rudimentary pressure of apostrophes, stripes, commas and strokes, of which we must admit that, after him, natural appearances are made.

And how many repressed elbow movements, ocular shocks recorded from life, observations made in front of the subject, luminous currents of the forces which work on reality, were necessary to overthrow the barrier before being finally compressed, raised on to the canvas and accepted:

There are no ghosts in Van Gogh's painting, no visions, no hallucinations. It is the torrid truth of the sun at two o'clock in the afternoon. But the suffering of the pre-natal is there.

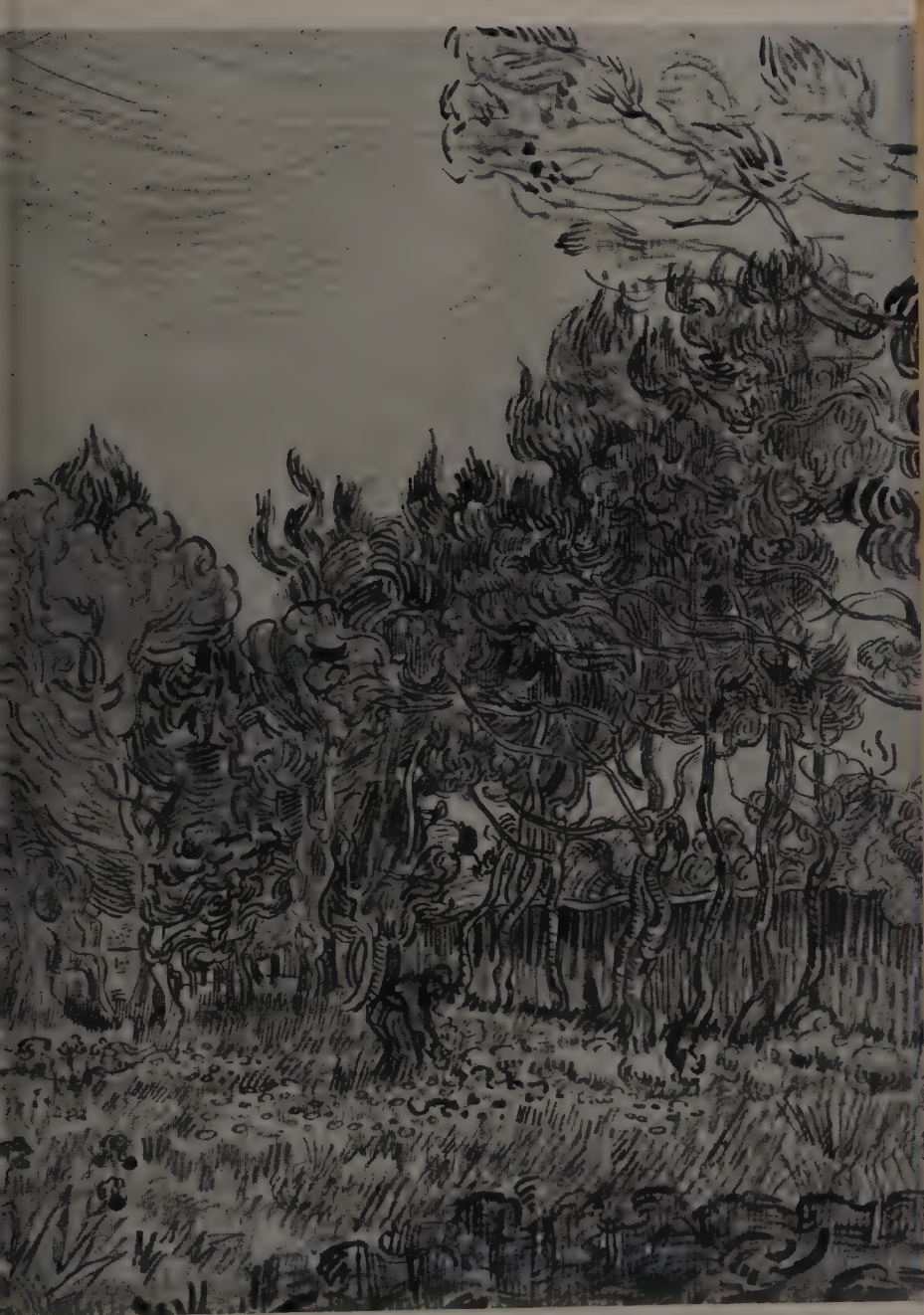




VAN GOGH. Cornfield and Cypress. St. Rémy. 1889. Ink and lead pencil



Fountain in the Hospital Garden. St. Rémy. Indian ink



The Park. Arles. Pencil

(Tate Gallery Collection)





Garden and cottages. Auvers. 1890. Charcoal, watercolour and oil paint



It is nature, pure and naked, seen just as it conceals itself when we know how to get near enough to it.

I remember his cornfield: ear upon ear, and that is all, with a few little, thin-sown poppy-heads in the foreground, bitterly and nervously applied there, knowingly and passionately dotted and slashed.

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Van Gogh will have surely been the most genuine *painter* of all the painters, the only one who has not exceeded painting in so far as painting is both the strict means of his work and the strict limit of his means. On the other hand, he is absolutely the only painter who has completely exceeded painting as the passive act of representing nature, in order to pour out from this exclusive representation of nature a whirlpool force, an element torn out of the heart's centre.

Nothing but painting—no more: no philosophy, mysticism, ritual, psychurgy or liturgy, no business with literature nor with poetry: these bronzed golden sunflowers are painted.

Better than any psychiatrist in the world, this is how the great Van Gogh has described his illness: 'I break through, I lose again, I examine, I grip hold of, I loosen, my dead life conceals nothing, and, besides, the *néant* has never done any harm to anyone, and what forces me to return to it is this distressing sense of absence, which passes by and sometimes drowns me, but I see very clearly into it; and I even know what the *néant* is, and I could tell you what is in it.'

Van Gogh was right. One can live for the infinite, only take pleasure in the infinite; there is enough infinite on the earth and in the stars to satiate a thousand great geniuses. If Van Gogh was unable to gratify his desire to suffuse his whole life with it, it is because society expressly and consciously forbade him.

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No one is alone any more in dying. But in the case of suicide, an army of wicked people is necessary to induce the body to that gesture against nature of depriving itself of its own heart.

Van Gogh was dispatched from the world, first by his brother telling him of the birth of his nephew, and then by Dr. Gachet, who one day, instead of advising him rest and isolation, sent

him out to paint in the open when he really felt that Van Gogh would have done better to go and rest.

For you cannot so immediately oppose a lucidity and sensibility of such a quality as that of the martyred Van Gogh.

There are some temperaments who, on certain days, would kill themselves for a simple contradiction; and for such a thing to happen there is no need to be a marked and listed madman. On the contrary, it is enough to be in good health and to have right on one's side.

In a similar case, I will no longer put up with hearing someone say to me, as has so often happened, 'Monsieur Artaud, you are raving', without committing a crime.

Van Gogh heard this said to him.

And this is why that knot of blood which killed him twisted itself around his throat.

[Excerpts from *Van Gogh, le Suicidé de la Société*, to be published by Editions K, Paris. Translated by PETER WATSON]

GRAHAM HOUGH

NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS-XII

GEORGE ELIOT

Now that the last relics of traditional England have just about disappeared, and fewer and fewer people have any idea, even imaginatively, of what it was all about, such pictures of it as we possess are beginning to acquire an almost archæological interest. It is surprising on investigation to find how unreliable many of the pictures are. I don't mean to repeat that Jane Austen took no notice of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars; here, surely, she was entirely just. To take no notice of convulsions in foreign parts till someone actually comes and drops something on you is one of the most permanent English characteristics; but if her *scènes de la vie de province* miss out, as they do, the farming, the horse-coping, the politics and the class relations, not much is left of the actual preoccupations of the time. Dickens, too; many of his social types are the offspring, not of observation, but of the

curious Victorian love of the grotesque, a neo-Gothic manufacturing of gargoyles; many of his coach-rides and lighted inn-parlours are just Christmas cards, still a part of English popular mythology, but even in its own day more mythology than anything. Not that this has any particular bearing on their merit as novelists. The novelist is perfectly at liberty to sound any corner of life that he likes, and leave the rest of the chart blank paper; or to construct a fantasy on the slightest basis of observed fact. But if we really want to know what it felt like to live in pre-Reform Bill England, we will not find out from *Emma* or *Pickwick*; we have to go to *Felix Holt* or *Middlemarch*, duller books, but much more like the real thing. At the head of George Eliot's not particularly popular virtues comes this sort of patient fidelity, undistorted by fancy or prejudice. Hers is not a gentlewoman's England, or a shabby-genteel England. She is not subject to the sudden drying up of discernment in the face of unfamiliar social types to which so many English novelists are prone. Sparing neither rank nor age nor sex, she looks at all with the same steady comprehension, and a sympathy which only, and after heroic efforts, breaks down (for George Eliot, too, is human) in face of certain types of feminine prettiness. And this is not done by any 'realist' exclusion of emotion. The sense that she is telling the truth, and a very large proportion of the whole truth, is no more evident in the solid but uncharming books, *Middlemarch* and *Felix Holt*, than in *Adam Bede*, with its golden pastoral glow. Although so much of herself went into her books—all her childhood and a good deal of her aspiring youth—she can draw just as well from the outside. Faiths which she did not share, a class to which she did not belong, and an undivided simplicity which she never possessed, are as real as all the difficult stages of her own development. This, I suppose, is one of the differences between being a great and merely a good novelist; and if one may compare the great with the greater still, that sort of luminous impartiality of vision reminds one more of Tolstoy than of any other English writer.

For some not wholly comprehensible reason the English snob system has provided the material for some of the greatest successes and some of the most conspicuous failures of the English novel. And this seems to happen to writers who have nothing else in common. Mr. Micawber and Strether of *The Ambassadors* both derive a good deal of virtue from their author's acute consciousness

of their own position in the social scheme. And the same double-edged knowledge accounts for the dreary sneering of the *Yellowplush Papers*, and Lawrence's misapprehension about his own work, which is mostly about class, not, as he supposed, about sex. English novelists on the whole are hideously conscious that they are either genteel or not genteel. But George Eliot seems to have escaped from this tiresome imbroglio. Mrs. Transome, in *Felix Holt*, is a *lady sans façon*; but neither she nor her author finds it necessary to make a fuss about it. Adam Bede is a workman; a girl of his own class is injured by Arthur Donnithorne, a gentleman trading on his rank. We know what Dickens, for instance, would have made of such a situation. But George Eliot can do it without any class-conscious heroics.

'I don't know what you mean by flirting,' said Adam, 'but if you mean behaving to a woman as if you loved her, and yet not loving her all the while, I say that's not the action of an honest man, and what isn't honest comes t'harm. I'm not a fool, and you're not a fool, and you know better than what you're saying. . . . I tell you as you've filled her mind so with the thought of you as it'll mayhap poison her life; and she'll never love another man as'll make her a good husband.'

The simple human essentials of the situation are enough for her. The fact is that George Eliot is writing about a time before the ordinary man had begun to have a sense of shame about the class system, and she inherits the unembarrassed attitude of that idyllic age. This actually falsifies her picture of Felix Holt himself, who is without the Radical bitterness and the Radical sense of guilt. But we can put up with a softened picture of one social reformer for the sake of the undistorted view of the ordinary people, unreformed and unreforming, who make up the majority of her characters.

Perhaps this is partly because she was born in the right place. Feelings about the class system are largely inherited, and are conditioned more by our parents' experience than by our own. The way not to feel bad about it is to have a father who has been modestly successful in his own rank, or who has risen a little above it. The children of the failures and the extravagant successes are the ones who feel uncomfortable. George Eliot's father was a builder, who made himself a successful land-agent by considerable skill and integrity. Like Adam Bede, he was a working man



who became a trusted factor of the gentry, became securely familiar with another class without losing his own. From her father's house George Eliot could look without embarrassment into both worlds; and before rural society began to worry about placing her, she escaped to London, to a society where these things didn't matter. So she was able to look back on her childhood world without taking sides, and without worrying about where she stood in relation to it.

The escape to London, and the laborious self-education that preceded it seem, however, an odd preparation for the novels. What on earth have the translation of Strauss and her slow immersion in the chilly water of Victorian agnosticism to do with her idyllic pictures of Methodist piety? How could the sub-editorship of the *Westminster Review*, the friendship with Herbert Spencer, and a respected position among the mid-century utilitarians serve as an apprenticeship for a great pastoral novelist? Indeed, the odd fragments of science and positivism that survive untransmuted are disconcerting bits of grit in her solid wholemeal bread. But actually her rather dusty intellectual training pervades her whole work. The fact that it was dusty didn't matter; her emotional nourishment came from other sources. The importance of her life in London was that it gave her a standing outside the world she was describing. The friend of Herbert Spencer and the philosophic Radicals, the woman who was able to do a man's job of hard intellectual donkey-work, and to make a happy alliance with Lewes in the teeth of mid-century Puritanism, had no need for diffidence in revisiting the scenes of her childhood. Her escape to London had not taken her into a coterie; it really was an escape into a wider world. The snuffy little literary clique does not really offer much of an exchange for the banalities of provincial life. But George Eliot's circle was not of this kind. Grimly unæsthetic as it was, it was also serious, scholarly and in touch with some of the main streams of thought in Europe. The effect of Strauss, Comte and Herbert Spencer on one less richly endowed with natural piety might have been disastrous, might have been to produce the crude positivism that makes the life of nine-tenths of ordinary people unintelligible. With George Eliot it seemed to set her emotions in focus, to put them at the right distance. And a well-worked intelligence is never wholly wasted; so many respectable novelists have got on with precious little of it that we

are apt to forget how useful it might have been to them. It really does help to have not only a sympathy with individual men and women, but some idea of how society works; to see the village church, not only as the appropriate centre of a pastoral landscape, but as part of European religious history. Compare, for instance, the coach ride in *Pickwick* with the one at the beginning of *Felix Holt*.

‘The shepherd with a slow and slouching walk, timed by the walk of grazing beasts, moved aside, as if unwillingly, throwing out a monosyllabic hint to his cattle; his glance, accustomed to rest on things very near the earth, seemed to lift itself with difficulty to the coachman. Mail or stage coach for him belonged to that mysterious distant system of things called “Gover’nment”, which, whatever it might be, was no business of his any more than the most outlying nebula or the coal-sacks of the southern hemisphere: his solar system was the parish; the master’s temper and the casualties of lambing time were his region of storms. He cut his bread and bacon with his pocket-knife, and felt no bitterness except in the matter of pauper labourers and the bad luck that sent contrarious seasons and the sheep-rot. . . . The passenger on the coach-box, bowled along above such a hamlet, saw chiefly the roofs of it: probably it turned its back on the road, and seemed to lie away from everything but its own patch of earth and sky, away from the parish church by long fields and green lanes, away from all intercourse except that of tramps. If its face could be seen, it was most likely dirty; but the dirt was Protestant dirt, and the big, bold, gin-breathing tramps were Protestant tramps. There was no sign of superstition near, no crucifix or image to indicate a misguided reverence: the inhabitants were probably so free from superstition that they were in much less awe of the parson than of the overseer. Yet they were saved from the excesses of Protestantism by not knowing how to read, and by the absence of handlooms and mines to be the pioneers of dissent: they were kept safely in the *via media* of indifference, and could have registered themselves in the census by a big black mark as members of the Church of England.’

This is what George Eliot owes to her London environment—that she can not only see the world of her novels as it is in itself, but can see, too, how it is related to other worlds; above all, that she knows that there are other worlds. This gives a sense of freedom;

from the world of Dickens, or from that of Jane Austen, there is no escape, for they do not know anywhere to escape to. If in George Eliot the slow patience of the rhythms of nature, the heavy progress of an inexorable morality do not become oppressive, it is because she knows that there is an appropriate region of liberty, and that it is in the mind, a place where the majority of respectable English novelists have never thought of looking for anything.

It is this tough matured intelligence that makes her return to her childhood so successful. I suppose the only condition on which a writer can return to his childhood with perfect safety is that he shall be really grown-up when he does it. And George Eliot began to be grown-up very early; she had the grown-up habit of solving her problems as she went along, instead of the youthful one of leaving them to pile up for the future. This, of course, is what made her life such hard work, and why she found it so frequently exhausting. She had never known the delectable freedom of living on tick and letting the bills look after themselves. A mistake, possibly; an imaginative writer can hardly afford to be so continually well-organized. But it means that she is at all times in full possession of herself, sure of her own position. She can be trusted with the remembrance of things past because she does not indulge in it to compensate for failures in the present. A characteristic Victorian attitude is that of the poem of Hood, in which he remembers the house where he was born, and finds at the end that he is farther away from heaven than when he was a boy. George Eliot does not find this. Nor does she find it necessary to believe in fairies. She makes no attempt at the Yeats trick of pretending to share the beliefs of her country people. It is the fact that she did not share them that enables her to do justice to them. The agnostic, the positivist, the friend of Herbert Spencer, by dint of just seeing the thing as it really was, becomes the great novelist of the varieties of religious experience, *goût anglais*. Her private sympathies on the whole were with the establishment, the old high-and-dry church; she preferred her piety without enthusiasm, and Mr. Gilfil to his spiky or evangelical successors.

'The farmers relished his society particularly, for he could not only smoke his pipe, and season the details of parish affairs with abundance of caustic jokes and proverbs, but, as Mr. Bond often said, no man knew more than the Vicar about the breed of cows

and horses. He had grazing-land of his own about five miles off, which a bailiff, ostensibly a tenant, farmed under his direction; and to ride backwards and forwards, and look after the buying and selling of stock, was the old gentleman's chief relaxation, now his hunting days were over. . . . Mr. Gilfil's sermons, as you may imagine, were not of a highly doctrinal, still less of a polemical cast. They perhaps did not search the conscience very powerfully; for you remember that to Mrs. Patten, who has listened to them for thirty years, the announcement that she was a sinner appeared an uncivil heresy; but on the other hand, they made no unreasonable demand on the Shepperton intellect—amounting, indeed, to little more than an expansion of the concise thesis, that those who do wrong will find it the worse for them, and those who do right will find it the better for them.'

Yet Dinah Morris's preaching on the village green at the beginning of *Adam Bede* must be one of the few sympathetic pictures of the early Methodist fervour. Simple piety is a difficult subject, and not many writers can do it like this, without satire and without unctuousness. And Mr. Lyon, of *Felix Holt*, with his physical insignificance, his unselfconscious integrity, and the complete unworldliness that makes him challenge the high-church rector to public debate, is an equally generous representation of provincial dissent. All this is on a different level of understanding from Dickens's Chadbands and Stigginses, or the upper-class pietism of Charlotte M. Yonge. Very few writers can avoid the allurements of irony or sentimentalism in dealing with a religious background they have themselves outgrown, and perhaps this is why, in spite of the notorious piety of English life, popular Protestantism has had so little justice done to it by English writers. Most of them have been concerned to show that they were clever enough to see through it, or, though clever, still good enough to respect it. But George Eliot is quite simply concerned with seeing the object as it really is, without the distortions of ambivalence. Temperamentally she is a conservative, in spite of the *Westminster Review* and her agnostic and radical associations. This sounds like the combination, familiar enough in our own century, of an intellectual acceptance of modernism and the belief in progress with an emotional preference for traditional ways of life, and George Eliot herself sometimes talks as though this were the case.

'Immense improvement! says the well-regulated mind, which



unintermittingly rejoices in the New Police, the Tithe Commutation Act, the penny-post, and all guarantees of human advancement. . . . Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors.'

But this is only a bit of Victorian romantic convention. She actually had an extremely well-regulated mind, and was the last person to allow an unresolved dichotomy of this sort to split her consciousness. Her parting with provincial religious and social tradition was not a joyous or a triumphant liberation; it was a weaning, undergone with considerable reluctance. It is commonly pointed out that though she abandoned the theology, she retained the morals of her childhood environment, and it is also commonly suggested that there is something confused about this, and that the Victorian agnostics should have retained both the baby and the bath water, or else have thrown them both away. Which, in this case, is baby and which bath water, and what is the proper relation between them, I do not pretend to know, but I do not think that this argument has much force in relation to George Eliot: her position seems perfectly clear. As she grew up she became convinced that the religious beliefs of her Midland elders were not in fact true. But she remained equally convinced that they had produced a way of life which was as satisfying for the common run of humanity as anything she knew. The rules were local rules, not absolute laws, and she was quite ready to break them herself on a sufficient occasion. But there is no need to despise a particular set of rules because they are not absolute; it is sufficient if they shape a culture which can give dignity and the means of happiness to those who belong to it. No doubt this could not happen unless the rules had some more than merely local sanction. This was where her positivist and scientific tendencies found satisfaction. On the whole, the rules she had been brought up with stood the test of practice. On the whole, the world really is like that; certain kinds of conduct really are followed by certain kinds of consequences; the laws of cause and effect in the moral world really do work as she had been taught they did, even if they do so for different reasons. The attitude is quite steady and consistent, and it does not involve any putting of telescopes to blind eyes. Neurosis is not the only way between

the savage Freudian alternatives of murdering your father or knuckling under to the old tyrant.

Having thus secured her own position, George Eliot is almost uniquely successful in dealing with the misfits in provincial life, those who are possessed by passions of which it knows nothing. *Middlemarch* is partly concerned with them. Dorothea Brooke's spiritual aspirations are hopelessly unable to contain themselves within the limits laid down for small-town young ladyhood; most writers of the time would have seen her through with the aid of red flannel petticoats and the distribution of soup; but George Eliot gives her intellectual ambitions which make that way out also unsatisfactory. The solution offered doesn't really work, and we are not convinced that Dorothea will ever be happy; but at least the problem has been stated with exemplary fullness. Casaubon is a scholar, and scholarship in English fiction is commonly either a joke or a half-pathetic symbol of other-worldliness. But George Eliot is able to show what goes on inside this particular kind of ivory tower—the slow drying-up of the emotional springs, the acrid competitiveness, the swollen self-esteem—and at the same time, the genuine devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow. What is more, Casaubon is a bad scholar; he has worked so long in isolation that he does not realize what the superficial Ladislav can see at once, that he is scratching a path through the brambles where others have already made a coach-road. There is nothing very startling in this—except that one is surprised to find such a topic in a novel at all, or a Victorian novelist who knows that such problems exist. Similarly with Lydgate: his degeneration into a mere fashionable doctor shows George Eliot's perhaps rather exaggerated apprehension about what happens to men who allow themselves to fall in love with pretty girls; but his attitude towards his profession in the earlier part of the book marks the arrival of a new motive in English fiction—the abstract devotion to science.

This, however, is by the way. The immediate effect of George Eliot's novels is made by the massive handling of the everyday stuff of life. In war, one seems to have heard, the moral is to the material as three is to one; in fiction opinion is pretty well divided. Virginia Woolf complained that Wells, Galsworthy and Bennet were materialists. Richardson and Henry James were clearly moralists, and Virginia Woolf herself was something different

from either, for which it is hard to find a convenient name. But the majority of English novelists seem to feel that a good deal of materialism is necessary to ballast the cranky ship of fiction. The belief is unfashionable, but one could reasonably argue that they are right. Perhaps it is vulgar to want to know what the small object of domestic utility in *The Ambassadors* really was; or what, if anything, Dr. Aziz really did to Miss Quested in the cave; but we mostly want to know. At any rate, those writers who can see the life of the mind, the conscience and the emotions as we inevitably do see it in actuality—as a superstructure on a basis of crass material fact—seem to have a strength that is denied to the more fastidious abstractionists. Perhaps this is merely a preference for thick soup over clear; and there certainly are periods when the soup becomes so thick as to be a kind of porridge. By the time we get to Virginia Woolf we are ready to feel as she did that it was time the English novel found a ray penetrating enough to see through ‘this preposterous, pragmatistical pig of a world’ that shoves itself obstinately between the writer and the pure emotion. The result of this in the post-Bennet novel is an immense increase of sensibility; or of those cruder aids, wit and scepticism, which can be made to serve something of the same purpose; but there is almost inevitably a corresponding decline in the sheer power of dealing with heavy lumps of fact; sometimes the sensibility is a little fluttery, and the scepticism merely paralysing. George Eliot, however, can face the horrid concrete mass without either diffidence or an affected superiority; she knows how to handle it and does it with an easy strength. The politics in *Felix Holt*, the country-town chicanery in *Middlemarch*, the horse-dealing, the muddles about money and the sex-life of the common pair of Cass brothers in *Silas Marner*, she can put them all in their right place, can give her work this massive realism without ever allowing it to overweight the structure of morality and emotional regeneration which is her real theme.

The forms taken by this theme sometimes look perilously like the stagey moral commonplaces of Victorian fiction. Silas Marner, the miser regenerated by his love for a child; Adam Bede, the strong man whose life has been ruined by a vain woman and is redeemed by a good one—these subjects are about as daunting as Dostoevsky’s murderer reading the Bible to the prostitute. Only a very strong writer can ever hope to get away with them, and

probably there is no one today who would try; but George Eliot has the unembarrassed attitude of her age to such things. In her case the strength is really there, and it lies mainly in the just measure given by her ethical scales, the almost unfailing rightness with which she estimates the moral weight of her characters. She can convey the fact that Harold Transome, in spite of his unpopular radicalism and a certain decent scrupulousness, is not a serious person; and that Mr. Lyon is, in spite of his nonconformist jargon. And she can do this without sacrificing one to the other; they are equally real. The motives she respects really are worthy of respect, on any reasonably realistic view of human life; the questions she thinks important, with few exceptions, really are important. So many moralists in fiction make a great pother over things that do not really matter, or do not matter much. Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, wants to substitute the ethics of the hearty for the ethics of the prig; a change for the better, but not so big a one as he seems to suppose. And Henry James—one remembers Forster's passage about being led reverently up to an altar on which are laid a dead mouse and a piece of string. It is George Eliot's particular distinction that she seems to know the terms on which life is really lived, and the relative importance of its different factors. Of course, she is not infallible in this respect. She resents some of the terms too bitterly to be fair about them. She sees with perfect clarity the power that beauty gives to its possessor; but how she hates it! She can only bear it if it is carefully disinfected; to be permissibly beautiful a woman must be a Methodist saint or a drowning Jewess. The classic example of this feeling is the cruelty with which she pursues Hetty Sorrel, surely a little distorted even on the level of fact and realism. It is not merely a sexual jealousy. Hetty's prettiness is of the kind that melted even her aunt, melted even George Eliot herself, and she resents it the more for that. Nor is it even the prudery of her age, though she had her share of it. Personal loveliness and the emotions it inspires are an irrational exception to her moral scheme, and she pursues it, with a relentless determination that there shall be no exceptions. She is paid out for it, in the left-handed way one is paid out for one's resentments, by the flat-footed heaviness of her style.

Perhaps she is paid out for it, too, by her relative failure in tragedy. You can't have tragedy without Dionysus. *Adam Bede* fails to be tragedy because of her determination that everyone



shall have his deserts; and the point of tragedy is that this does not occur. In *The Mill on the Floss*, where there is more of the formal tragic scheme, the tragedy breaks down because the fatal attraction between Maggie and Stephen Guest is never made living. It is no use telling us that people experience disastrous physical fascinations; we know that; but we need to feel the reality of this particular one. We never are made to feel it. Neither Philip Wakem nor Stephen Guest is strong enough to do his job in the plot. You can't make a tragic love-story out of a conflict between a thin bundle of sensibilities and a tailor's dummy. In this weakness George Eliot is not alone. 'Two loves have I of comfort and despair' has been the theme of much fiction, but the reader does not commonly experience much of either the comfort or the despair. In George Eliot's case it is possible to apply the robust Johnsonian argument. 'But love is only one of many passions: as it has no great influence on the sum of life, it has little operation in the drama of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world.' But it will not altogether work. Though sexual themes are not dominant in her novels, she does put a good deal of weight on them, and as she handles them they are not strong enough to bear it. It is the same soft spot as we find in all the mid-century novelists.

Presumably her contemporary admirers did not notice it; indeed, they seem to have placed her in a special niche apart from other writers of fiction. When Herbert Spencer founded the London Library he deliberately excluded novels, but made an exception for the works of George Eliot. If by this the philosopher of evolution meant to signalize the arrival of a new mutation in the development of fiction, he was probably right. With George Eliot the novel develops a sense of responsibility. Of course, the artist may feel a sense of responsibility in different ways. One is to art, as an autonomous activity, and of this George Eliot had as little as most of her contemporaries. Another is responsibility of a less æsthetic kind, a responsibility to life as it is, an intention of doing justice to the facts of the case. This sounds dull; its importance is that it delivers the novel from the bondage to a convention of popular entertainment that beset Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope. When George Eliot deserts this austere devotion to the plain truth and starts romancing, as she does about Daniel Deronda, the result is not above the level of most Victorian

romancing. She does not create a mythology, and she has none of the more evident attractions of the writers who impose their own sensibility or their own world-view on their material. If at one end of the scale the novel approximates to poetry, she leads it firmly in the other direction, towards the virtues peculiar to prose fiction—the untendentious study of life as it is actually lived.

ROBERT TALLANT

## WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

### XIII: NEW ORLEANS

THE American writer often must escape the community in which he has been reared. Having announced that he is going to write, he cannot long endure the attacks of his family, friends and neighbours. It is not any initial announcement that is disturbing, but what sometimes follows. Slowly at first, and then more rapidly, the writer's manner of living changes. He may sit at his typewriter eight hours each night, but in the afternoon, when all the other young men are in their offices and shops, he is seen walking in the park or beside the river, or drinking beer in the taverns. He may be noticed spending much time with the most disreputable, and only to him most colourful, characters in his town. He may have decided to discontinue attending church. He may even find the 'nice girls', one of whom he is expected to marry, dull and stupid. It is easily deduced from this behaviour that he is an idler, a drunkard and that, in due time, he will disgrace his family.

The American is still a vigorous adolescent who always suspects and frequently hates the schoolmate who stands a bit apart, who does not play his games with him. The most important of these games is to work, and few Americans ever look upon writing as work, perhaps because for the beginning writer it pays almost nothing at all; few can support themselves, and not to support oneself in the United States is a heinous offence against the moral code. American parents are as a whole indulgent ones. They are generous and they educate their children to the best of their

ability, but when schooling is completed it is assumed they will take their place in a business or a profession or a trade. If Junior wants to stay home and write (or paint) it is quite embarrassing. They are likely to send for the family doctor. All this will change of course when Junior is successful financially—if he sells his book to Hollywood for many thousands of dollars. Then he will be welcomed home with cocktail parties and invited to lecture. He has made a lot of money, and he is worthy of respect.

The United States is so immense it would seem the choice of the runaway writer would be a wide one, yet this is not true. The choice narrows to a city, for few beginning writers select the country or a small town. That would only duplicate what he is leaving, and would offer none of the companionship of his own kind.

He may decide upon New York, but few writers can write in New York. The tempo of the city is too fast, too exhausting, too noisy, too expensive. Hollywood is for the successful, the best-selling novelist, for whose 'name' the glittering semi-illiterates of Hollywood are offering an irresistible sum of money.

Many writers have found, at least for a period, what they want, what they require, in New Orleans, a city different from any other in America. Most of these have lived for a few years in that section called the *Vieux Carré* or French Quarter, have written their first books there, and then gone on to New York or Hollywood. There are many things that make New Orleans desirable, not the least among them being the fact that not only is it not considered disgraceful here to resist working in business or in a trade, but that among certain old families it was until recently unthinkable to do so.

The *Vieux Carré* has been an incubator for more American literature than even its residents realize. By American standards New Orleans is quite old, and the *Vieux Carré* was the original city established by the first colonists sometime about 1715, with boundaries that are now Canal Street, the principal business street of New Orleans, north a dozen blocks to a wide boulevard with the curious name of Espanade Avenue. On the eastern edge is the wide, grey Mississippi river, and nine blocks away is its western edge at North Rampart Street, where once stood the ramparts erected for the defence of the settlement. A very small place it is, and about half of it is still composed of tenements in which live

Negroes, poor Sicilians, and others of the impoverished in such squalor and filth and general wretchedness as to have been described by some travellers as the worst slums in the nation. Within the other half of the French Quarter, that part nearest the river and Canal Street, are most of the things that interest the tourist—Royal Street, with its endless chain of antique shops, the St. Louis Cathedral and Jackson Square, called by many architects the most perfect architectural setting in the United States, Bourbon Street, with as many night clubs, bars and cafés as Royal Street has shops, and many tall brick buildings, most of them dingy and unpainted, but with lovely wrought-iron balconies, curious, narrow, winding stairways and dark, curving arches that lead to courtyards and patios filled with flowers and palms and banana trees. It is all unlike anything else in America and yet it is not quite like anything in Europe, either. Some of the buildings show French or Spanish or Moorish influence, but most are a blending of all of these, with certain, usually indefinite, alterations and modifications that seem to have been either experimental on the part of the architect or owner, or were adaptations to the climate and the period in which they were built.

In this section of the *Vieux Carré* live as assorted and as lively a conglomeration of human beings as is likely to be found in any space so small. Here are families who have occupied the same house for more than a century, who seldom speak any language but French and seldom travel more than a half-dozen blocks from their residences. Here live painters who find the *Vieux Carré* one of the most appealing subjects in the country. Here live prostitutes, night club entertainers, bartenders and professional gamblers. Here live some of the wealthiest people in New Orleans and beggars, side by side, quite literally. Here, too, of course, are bohemians of both the most irritating and the most amusing types.

New Orleans was never puritanical or Victorian in any of the definitions that may be given those abused and over-used words. Far removed from the Atlantic seaboard, its settlers were French and Spanish, and these Creoles clung to a bitter resentment for the Americans when they came that lasted for a hundred years. Now the Creoles that remain are an acquiescent minority in numbers, but their spirit, their manners and their morals conquered. There is a saying in New Orleans that all who live here a year become 'creolized'. There is a small and rare book now out of print



called *Sherwood Anderson and Other Creoles*. Sherwood Anderson, who lived most of his life in the Middle West, spent a few years in New Orleans, but he became 'creolized', too. So the writers come and, at least for a time, enjoy being Creoles, or at least Orleanians, which is what the rest of the city's residents call themselves.

Most of the writers live in the French Quarter when they come, but there is much to see and interest them outside it. Nearly a third of the population of the city are Negroes, and these provide much interest and material. The Negroes in New Orleans live in segregation from the whites, as they do in all the southern portion of the United States. The races do not attend the same restaurants or theatres or mix socially or in business. These Negroes have created their own world, both from choice and from necessity. It is a very brightly coloured world. There are good schools for Negroes in New Orleans, including two universities, and many receive excellent education, degrees and training in the professions, but for the most part their schooling ends in the elementary grades. Most of them remain poor, half ignorant and superstitious. Belief in voodoo, for instance, is widespread, and thousands of New Orleans Negroes guide all the affairs of their lives according to the advice of some aged Voodooienne or witch doctor, and spend much of their money on charms and *gris-gris*.

There is a popular opinion in the southern portion of the United States that has become a platitude among the white population, but which, like all generalizations, is not true: that 'Negroes are the happiest people in the world'. Yet Negroes do have a sort of gaiety—a childlike delight in enjoying themselves. It is because of this perhaps that the New Orleans Negroes were able to give jazz music to the world. Jazz was played by Negro bands and pianists in the city long before World War I, first among themselves and for themselves, and then for the amusement of the patrons of the gaudy bordellos along Basin Street, where stood the most luxurious, expensive and notorious houses of prostitution in the United States, which operated under licence and protection from the city officials and police. The very word 'jazz', in those days, was a colloquialism meaning sexual intercourse.

Basin Street is gone and prostitution has been illegal in New Orleans since 1917, but the city still has a vivid night life and an

inordinate fondness for it that without a doubt surpasses any city of its size in the nation, and most two or three times its size. In Negro clubs and cafés and along Bourbon Street, jazz as pure as that played for the ladies and gentlemen of Basin Street may still be heard, and except for a few jazz 'artists' who have taken it to other cities or on tours it can be heard nowhere else. The young mayor of New Orleans, De Lesseps Story Morrison, known usually as 'Chep', has complained in a recent magazine article that the city has a reputation as 'a honkey-tonk town', which means that it is too well known for an excessive number of cheap and tawdry night clubs, and it is true that there is almost a total absence of smart supper clubs and swank bars of the types New York loves. New Orleans likes it this way. New Orleans likes jazz-bands and strip-teasers undressing themselves on bars, and tiny cafés where one can sit and talk (and drink) all night long to the music of a pianist, who grows less inhibited as the hours pass. And the people who come here, including writers, like it as it is.

There are many other things the writers who come to New Orleans like, including some of the finest cuisine in the country, which is not confined at all to the famous and expensive restaurants, but is relatively true of the most modest ones and of the home-cooking of the 600,000 residents. And until World War II it was the cheapest American city in which to live.

New Orleans was discovered by American writers early in its history. Walt Whitman worked for a New Orleans newspaper. Samuel Clemens often came to the city, first as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River, later as Mark Twain, the pen-name he used in his writing career, and upon which he first decided while in New Orleans. For ten years Lafcadio Hearn lived here, and here wrote and published his first translations and novel. In his letters Hearn often referred to himself as being 'creolized'.

Yet perhaps the most interesting period in the literary history of New Orleans began in the years just after the first World War. In January 1921 a group of young poets, writers and artists in the city published the first issue of the *Double Dealer*, a literary magazine of such excellent quality that it acquired a national reputation. The list of writers whose early work it presented during the five years of its existence contained many names that are still important. Ernest Hemingway's first publications appeared in the *Double Dealer*. Edmund Wilson, then living in the *Vieux*

*Carré*, contributed youthful verse and prose. 'A brief biographical note that accompanied a small poem by William Faulkner in the March 1922 issue identified the author as 'a young Southern poet of unusual promise'. Sherwood Anderson, by now so 'creolized' that he had bought a home in the *Vieux Carré*, which he shared for a time with Faulkner, published most of the articles he later combined into *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook* first in the *Double Dealer*. Thornton Wilder, Djuna Barnes, Allen Tate, Padraic Colum, Carl Van Vechten, Maxwell Bodenheim, Hart Crane, Witter Bynner, Henry Bellamann, Vincent Starrett, Roark Bradford, Lyle Saxon, Carl Sandburg and many others appeared from time to time in the slight, always struggling, little magazine.

Also, for the re-creation of the literary world in New Orleans one man was perhaps as responsible as was the *Double Dealer*. Lyle Saxon had come down the river to New Orleans from the town of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a few years before World War I. He worked as a newspaper reporter for a living, but his real occupation was absorbing the city. It is doubtful that any man ever loved a city more, or became more closely identified with one. More than thirty years after he came to New Orleans to live, in 1946, just before his death, Saxon used to say with mingled humour and bitterness, 'Now I've become a folk character. They've made me Mr. New Orleans.' It was quite true. 'They' had.

But the young Lyle Saxon was not bitter. When, in his early twenties, tall, striking and impeccably dressed, he strode through the *Vieux Carré's* narrow streets and saw the frightful and chaotic state of decay into which the once charming neighbourhood had descended, he knew what it was he wanted to do. His friends tried to dissuade him, but he rented, as he later said, 'a sixteen-room house for sixteen dollars a month', on Royal Street, furnished five rooms of it, which were all he could afford to furnish, and opened his house to anyone who cared to come and particularly to the writers, artists and musicians living in, or visiting in, the city. And for thirty years he maintained his salon—in other houses, in *Vieux Carré* apartments, from time to time in a cabin on Melrose Plantation in northern Louisiana, and at last in a huge room at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans. For thirty years he was the pivot about which literary New Orleans turned.

Leasing that Royal Street house and going to live in the *Vieux*

*Carré* as it was then was startling, even shocking. Old people, descendants of the Creoles, still clung with grim tenacity to a few of the homes, but all other buildings were occupied by the extremely poor, often by criminals. After dusk few respectable persons ventured into the neighbourhood. Thugs waited in dark alleyways. Prostitutes stood naked behind shuttered doors and windows. The courtyards were filled with refuse, and the filth was incredible. Saxon was told he would be murdered. Once this almost came true. Three ruffians broke into his Royal Street house, bound him with wire and tortured him with lighted matches and cigarette stubs and kicked out two of his teeth, all in an effort to make him tell where his valuables were concealed. 'All I had', he said later, 'was some silver, and my grandpa's gold watch-chain.'

He remained in his house and began to coax his friends to move into the *Vieux Carré*, or at least to visit him. They came at least to visit. Sherwood Anderson came every day for lunch. Soon he bought a house a few blocks away. An Ohio schoolteacher who wanted to paint the *Vieux Carré*, Alberta Kinsey, was convinced she should not return to her small town but should settle here. She had only a few dollars in the world but Lyle found her a room on credit in a house otherwise occupied by questionable tenants, found her some furniture, and brought his newspaper friends to see her pictures, which she sold at first for two dollars each. Now Alberta owns a house on Royal Street herself and heads the city's art colony. 'But then,' Alberta will tell you, 'if I went to the corner to post a letter after dark I would run both ways.'

A close friend was Roark Bradford, then also a reporter, but later to write a half-dozen books, one of which was *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, later adapted for the stage by Marc Connelly as *Green Pastures*. There was John McClure, the poet, and, later, Faulkner, Wilson, Oliver Lafarge, Edith Davenport, many of them. New York friends were invited to visit in Saxon's house. They came, and many either remained in the *Vieux Carré*, or the *Vieux Carré*, as seen through Saxon's eyes, remained so in their memories that they returned often and sent *their* friends. Gradually the neighbourhood became more and more an art colony, less an underworld. Saxon talked to the owners of buildings and convinced them that they could and should be restored to their former elegance. Then he



convinced 'uptown' acquaintances that they should move to the *Vieux Carré*. Today that half of it near Canal Street contains some of the most valuable property in the city, and the popularity of the section as a residential one is still spreading. Once Lyle Saxon pointed out to me a vine that is famous in the *Vieux Carré*. 'Look,' he said, 'I planted that in my courtyard in Royal Street. Now it covers five houses.'

In those first years he lived in the Royal Street house, Saxon fought incessantly for what he wanted New Orleans to become. Never rich, he gave away nearly everything he earned throughout his life. No one knows, and he would never tell, how many young writers he housed and fed during his lifetime. And it was not always writers that he helped. When the French Opera House burned in 1919, he began a long struggle to have it rebuilt. In this he never succeeded, but he dreamed that the city might again become the musical centre of the United States it had been a century ago. At the time of the fire he wrote in his newspaper account, 'The heart of the old French Quarter has stopped beating'. When Saxon died another reporter, in another paper, commented, 'The heart of New Orleans stopped beating last night'.

Until the last journey to the hospital, Saxon, sick and weak, but still tall and straight, wearing the huge, wide-brimmed, planter-style hat he always wore, carrying, through necessity, one of his collection of walking-sticks, strolled every day that he was able through the *Vieux Carré*, looking at everything he passed, approving this, disapproving of that, still absorbing it all, stopping to laugh at the vine that covers five houses, talking to shopkeepers, bartenders, friends on the street, then returning to the big room at the St. Charles Hotel to entertain the people who always awaited him there. The last few months that afternoon walk was all the exercise he could bear, and he would return exhausted of strength, yet the last remnants of his strength were given the *Vieux Carré*, as had so much of his young energy.

The last three years he suffered a premonition of death, that was persistent, constant, and fearful to his friends. He talked of it often, always adding, 'Don't grieve for me. I've had a wonderful time.' In those three years he spent six long periods in hospitals, without ever receiving a satisfactory answer to what was wrong with him physically. Always a good drinker, now he drank incessantly because he felt so ill, the drink made him sicker, and

it was a vicious merry-go-round. He sat out on a balcony before the St. Charles Hotel on Mardi Gras 1946, and described the first Mardi Gras since the beginning of World War II over a national radio broadcasting chain. A few days later he was again in the hospital. This time he found out he had cancer. He joked about it: 'There's no answer to cancer,' he would say. 'Don't worry. I've had a wonderful time.' Death came on 9 April. He was fifty-four. There were still a dozen books he might have written. There were still countless people he might have *created*.

But the *Vieux Carré* and the vine he planted are still here. And even now New Orleans has more than its share of writers, some of them native, some who are in the process of being 'creolized'. A few of his writing friends, Roark Bradford and John McClure, for instance, still live in the *Vieux Carré*. Weeks Hall, who resides at *The Shadows* in New Iberia, Louisiana, one of the State's most beautiful and authentic plantation houses, who was one of Saxon's closest friends and who is himself an artist, raconteur and intimate of some of the country's most distinguished minds, is often in and about the city, remarking how strange it is not to stop for a visit with Lyle at the St. Charles Hotel. Harnett T. Kane, Father Edward F. Murphy, Max White, Frances Parkinson Keyes, Pendleton Hogan, Jeanne de Lavigne, James K. Feibleman, W. Adolph Roberts, Murrell Edmonds, Sue Brown Hays and Clarence Laughlin are all writing books in the city—and sometimes about it.

The Creoles and Basin Street, the *Double Dealer* and Lyle Saxon, all these are gone, but from behind lighted windows in the *Vieux Carré's* narrow streets there comes the sound of typewriters as you pass them at night. Young and as yet unknown men and women who have escaped their small towns in Ohio and Mississippi and South Dakota are at work. Perhaps there is not another Anderson or Hemingway or Faulkner among them. Perhaps there is. We will know in time.

# LAND HO! INFINITY!

## EMILY DICKINSON AS A PROTESTANT TELESCOPE

*The Poems of Emily Dickinson. Bolts of Melody (New Poems).* Jonathan Cape.  
16s. each.

With the republication in England of the collected poems of Emily Dickinson, and the first publication of some 650 new poems which appeared in America several years ago under the unfortuitous title of *Bolts of Melody*, the British public can now reacquaint itself with a poetess who has long been praised on the other side of the Atlantic by epithets ranging from 'quaint' to 'greatest woman poet since Sappho'. It is an understandable critical paradox that she has been both over-praised and underpraised. No poet in the English language has ever had so many serious faults existing simultaneously with a formidable genius, and the diffused talent has attracted admirers from all levels, with occasional unfair criticism from the highest.

The externals of her reclusive life were few. Emily Dickinson was born and died in Amherst, Massachusetts, her life covering roughly the span of Queen Victoria's reign. She led a life of complete introversion, influenced by a brief and ill-starred love, and marked by a prodigious output of poems which became more and more her *raison d'être*. They were written on the backs of recipes, chocolate wrappers, paper bags, grocery lists, and on the inside of envelopes, which she dearly loved. Reticence allowed very few of them to be printed during her lifetime, and it was only the posthumous devotion of a sister, Lavinia, which gave the world the poems, plus a slam-bang editorial feud.

It would be hazardous to attempt to weigh the efficacy of the multiple lady editors (Mabel Loomis Todd, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Millicent Bingham Todd) who brought the poems forth from crabbed and disparate manuscripts, stuffed with alternative words and phrases. But one observes that the taste of these three-name invincibles was painfully similar, as evinced by their editorial comments and their title-selecting for a division of the poems. Millicent Bingham Todd relies, even more than her predecessors, on gingham-and-calico phrases from the poems themselves. Hence the title, *Bolts of Melody*. For the contents: 'Our Little Kinsmen', 'That Campaign Inscrutable', 'My Pageantry'. There is an irritating habit of referring to the poet as Emily: "'Our Little Kinsmen": Emily contemplates "several of nature's people. . . ." 'The busy-in-the-kitchen-and-garden imagery which filled many of the verses seems to have delighted the editors more than the esoteric and oblique poems, by which Emily Dickinson's real genius is evident. The discriminating reader will have no difficulty in separating the genuine poems from the calendar lyrics.

The twelve or thirteen hundred verses in the two volumes run the gamut from trivial to superb. A happy number of them record, for whole sustained poems, an extraordinary feminine sensibility and a lean, admirable metaphysic. The sensibility pared itself down to a brilliance of aphorism and paradox, while the metaphysic lent a precision and a validity to the wild hyperbole and use of poetic abstraction which mark her work. These qualities are unfortunately

allied with a depressing lack of poetic technique; and with a lack of taste (understandable in the self-imposed hermeticism) which allowed her to record sometimes sketchy and frequently banal thoughts and feelings; and which misused the unique gifts themselves.

The most immediately appealing of Emily Dickinson's abilities, a striking modernity of word and metaphor, was prophetically in advance of its time. Her use of language inevitably involves the much-abused term 'metaphysical', and a comparison of affinities with those 'moderns', the metaphysical seventeenth-century poets. The features of metaphysical poetry usually imply: (a) A use of words and symbols which are 'modern', coming out of the science, the learning and conceptions relevant to a period; anything goes in the use of language. In this sense, the majority of poets writing today are 'metaphysical'. (b) A use of unhomogeneous images or ideas, welded together into metaphor by a solder of predominant emotion. The mind of the metaphysical poet operates by conflicts, and knows the value of irony and paradox. In the seventeenth century, the conflicts stemmed from upheavals in religion, science and politics. Though the Victorian Age was a quiescent lie, Emily Dickinson, partly through personal unhappiness, partly through other reasons which could be traced, was led to the contradictions out of which metaphysical poetry arises. The soil is all too familiar to our age, and accounts for our interest in these poets. Lastly, (c) the subject matter of the poetry is often metaphysical, religion being a prominent theme, but subject to inner doubts and conflicts. Emily Dickinson is, then, a metaphysical poet in the not-so-loose sense of the word. But the comparison has its limits. Certainly, she lacked the philosophy and learning of the seventeenth-century poets. Her sense of irony was not as great as theirs: she was infinitely more naïve. She possessed little theological wit, and her conflicts were far from Donne's sophisticated passion. Her conception of God was indeed closer to Blake's, and their flashes of insight are not unanalogous.

Emily Dickinson's poetry is often highly condensed, both in syntax and image. The word became a poetic shorthand with her, enabling her to be that much more aphoristic, conciseness and precision co-ordinating to sharpen the meaning. She pins down her abstractions with this precise imagery, and her physical observations are acute and appropriate. Marianne Moore, among modern American poets, has a similar type of precision on the level of physical observation. Miss Moore sees the ostrich moving his neck with 'needle-compass nervousness'. Emily Dickinson observes a dog moving like 'intermittent plush'. The latter image is highly condensed, more daring; and its wrenched ellipsis renders it poetically exciting. A recent criticism by C. Day Lewis objects to this 'coarse caption-writing'. One is reminded of Dr. Johnson's short-sighted attack on the metaphysicists. It seems to me to be petteiness to minimize Emily Dickinson's gifts as a sort of 'poetic journalese'. At this late date, it is scarcely necessary to defend psychological and syntactical condensations and ellipses, or the use of the unusual modifier to open up fresh apprehensions of tired substantives. Emily Dickinson's thought may sometimes be shallow, but her metaphor is authentic. Mr. Lewis quotes several excellent images as bad examples, and I can only conclude from the haggling that he is becoming more conservative on the crags. He needs a new llama.



When her images fail (and they often do), it is not because of any intrinsic poetic lack in the image itself. Her sentiments tend to get out of proportion, and she lacks the ability to evaluate the justification of hyperbole or personification in specific instances. This is a disciplinary and critical lack (understandable in one who had no points of contact on which to sharpen her talents) but does not invalidate the gift, which even in a disastrous poem can be arresting. Words are always used in admirably fresh and foreign association. Thus one finds: 'russet halts in nature's march', 'the italic face', death's 'metallic peace'. A storm becomes 'doom's electric moccasin'. Out of context, certain phrases sound odd; but in the poems, many of these torques of adjective are successful. 'A quartz contentment like a stone' is perfectly justified psychologically, and enriches the passage by its odd precision.

It is no accident, in explaining her gifts, that she was a Protestant by religion and a Yankee by inheritance. The Yankee side gave the leaning for hyperbole and originality that mark her work. 'If father is asleep on the lounge the house is full,' she would say. This special kind of hyperbole is a peculiarly American gift, shared in varying degrees by a number of American writers. One has only to think of the work of such diverse talents as Melville, Mark Twain, or O. Henry. Exaggeration becomes a genuine, idiomatic part of their work, marked always, and differentiated from any similar European strain, by an adventurous *naïveté* which can carry the hyperbole further than anybody else, without becoming embarrassed by the distance. And Emily Dickinson was certainly naïve: it is such an insistent charm that even when the hyperbole is applied to subject matter which simply won't carry the weight, the effects, though disastrous, are often delightful. This is the explanation to the fact that many of her mawkish and inconsequential verses have an undeniable charm. There is no getting around the audacity of American exaggeration!

Her Protestantism donated, besides the religious bent, a boniness of expression (consider the austerity of the inside of a Protestant church!). The coupling of this leanness with the hyperbole is astonishing in the limited poems where they reach a disciplined equilibrium with the experience.

The nature poems are the most uneven: personification here is frequently disingenuous. Images and conceits are charged with lady-like sentiment like an Ever-Ready battery. Some of the poems were sent to nieces and nephews, or to friends, enclosing flowers, a red leaf, a cocoon, a sunset. Out of the group there emerge whole poems (to her credit, quite a number) in which the imagery is appropriate, and in which the implied sentimentality does not occur at all. Thus, in successful poems, 'A south wind has a pathos / Of individual voice', autumn is 'An artery upon the hill / A vein along the road', 'A snake is summer's treason', a moth 'Haunts candles in Brazil', the spider 'rears supreme / His theories of light'.

One finds a limbo region of her work which is neither good nor bad, and which exerts, in its own peculiar way, an undeniable charm, absurd, whimsical, sad or touching by turns. A genuine pathos is manifest: a sensitive woman has come to love, not only nature, but humanity as well, all the more dearly for her reclusion. If that reclusion brought on certain eccentricities which reflected themselves in quaintness, it also expressed its authentic gentility and deep feeling.

Earmarking all of the poems, there is an appalling fluctuation which is present at any stage of development. Some of the experiential poems are little better than Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Not a few are highly original in observation, and her awareness of paradox, her continual hyperbole, often serve to give a fresh twist to the subject matter. Poem after poem, whether it develops as good or bad, starts with an exhilarating bang: 'A charm invests a face / Imperfectly beheld', 'Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn', 'Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul'. The variety of subjects indicates a lively and often witty preoccupation with all manner of thought and experience. Hers was a spontaneous outpouring; there was no laboured perfecting of the product. The poems were tossed off in all stages: fragmentary, awful, stimulating, a few perfect . . .

If the bells of madness did not ring in the nature poems, they began to ring in the deepening poems of experience. Intensity of feeling acted as a diamond dust to cut her gifts and give a discipline which she ordinarily lacked. Certain acute observations of aspects of suffering and death are remarkable. Intermittent great poems come out of the furnace, tempered by precision, by an appropriate use of hyperbole, by the exact comparison:

'After great pain a formal feeling comes,  
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs.  
The stiff Heart questions—was it He that bore?  
And yesterday—or centuries before?  
The feet mechanical  
Go round a wooden way  
Of ground or air or Ought, regardless grown,  
A quartz contentment like a stone.  
This is the hour of lead  
Remembered if outlived,  
As freezing persons recollect the snow—  
First chill; then stupor, then the letting go.'

But she did not stop with her mundane experience. Like another American, Melville, she grappled with immensities and terrors. In the spiritual life, both were extensions of the American pioneer spirit. And the vigour of Puritan Protestant exploration is a peculiar one. It is austere yet passionate, almost morbid, yet not decadent. It conceives of God not always in terms of love, but often in terms of an abstract, awful awe. Emily Dickinson loved God, but she was also aware of the terror of Him as an abstract, and of His concomitant abstracts—the terror of Death, of the Last Judgement, of the meaning of Eternity:

' . . . The possibility to pass,  
Without a moment's bell,  
Into Conjecture's presence—  
Is like a face of steel  
That suddenly looks into ours  
With a metallic grin,—  
The cordiality of Death  
Who drills his welcome in.'

Her preoccupation with death is obsessively manifold. She must have greeted herself daily with *memento mori*. The quotidian experience included death by drowning, by freezing, by being trapped in a coal-mine, by thirst, by sickness, by indirection. Death is 'the supple suitor' who woos by 'pallid innuendoes'. 'A coffin is a small domain.' Houses where people have recently died have a 'numb look'. And always: 'The Grave is strict— / Tickets admit / Just two— The Bearer / And the Borne— / And seat just one . . .'

She threw herself into a contemplation of these mysteries. She used an inverse hyperbole to drag God down to her own level. Again and again in *Moby Dick*, Melville establishes electrical contact with the reader, terrifying him into contemplation of whole areas of ambiguity which dwarf him. The latter poems of Emily Dickinson sometimes open up areas which even *she* must have done a double-take at:

'Water makes many beds  
For those averse to sleep,  
Its awful chamber open stands  
Its curtains blandly sweep;  
  
Abhorrent is the rest  
In undulating rooms  
Whose amplitude no clock invades,  
Whose morning never comes.'

If Melville's explorations are more frightening, it is because of his great sense of the implicit evil in the universe. Emily Dickinson, remote from evil, retained a kind of *naïveté* to the last. But aside from their obvious similarities, the comparison becomes gratuitous, since Melville was primarily a novelist.

Limited by her quaintness, her sallies into the hinterlands of Eternity are for the most part only an eccentric achievement. Many a better poet would have wisely shied away from these abstracts. She writes about them as though she were doing a ballet with a ten-ton weight balanced on one forefinger: 'The only news I know / Is bulletins all day / From Immortality.' 'Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me.' But a few of the poems are more than naïve conceptions: they have an inverted profundity. Death and Eternity are shrunk through the lens of this fantastic Protestant mind, and personified with a dazzling conceit. The microscope makes a fly seem as big as a house; Emily Dickinson makes Eternity seem as small as a fly ('I heard a fly buzz when I died'). With the optical function so reversed, immensities are reduced to peculiarly personal limits: *her* limits. We have looked through the wrong end (it may be the right end!) of a Protestant telescope, and have seen diminished abstractions in a clear, bright focus. We laugh because everything seems small and ridiculous. But her best hyper-metropia disturbs us: the trick is ambiguous enough to be unfunny . . .

It is in a sense carping to complain of her lack of poetic technique. Perhaps church hymns were a traumatic influence. She was a plain, unschooled and unsophisticated poetess. But her use of the short line is at least organically justified: the truth is that she employed (however naïvely) the *meter and forms which she needed*. Her aphoristic mind flowed naturally into the simple con-



structions she made for herself. The pentameter line was anathema to her: she needed few, not many words. Trimeter is Protestant in its austerity! We can only regret her lack of a greater technical skill in using it.

The remarkable achievement, the poetic fruition and discipline in her few great poems, are a tribute to her natural genius, and to the suffering which anticipated its immortality by producing out of a thousand haphazard poems, several score or more of high and unique merit. Both atavist and innovator, Emily Dickinson is unquestionably *somebody* in the history of English poetry.

WALDEMAR HANSEN

## CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,

Dr. Herbert Read, understandably appalled at the prospect of Government Picture-Buying Committees and perpetually increasing Museums of Modern Art, urges painters to give up painting except as a spare-time hobby and go in for industrial design. Like William Morris, Dr. Read wants to stop artists fiddling about on the perimeter of civilization and set them to work at the creative centre. Unfortunately, unlike William Morris, he does not face the fact that a machine civilization which makes the artist look like a parasite also puts the craftsman out of business. Before the Industrial Revolution it was quite possible for large numbers of artists like William Kent to design stage-coaches and furniture and garden ornaments as well as buildings, because no two such objects need be alike. Now, heading for the People's Car and the People's Radio and the People's Refrigerator, we are beginning to realize that we shall need fewer, not more, industrial designers. And anyhow one wonders whether the painter and the industrial designer nowadays are the same kind of person. Biologically I imagine there is a permanent tendency towards specialization, which can hardly be arrested artificially by closing down the art schools.

No, surely what we want are not fewer pictures, but more buyers. The money is there, no longer concentrated in a few exquisite hands, but in the pockets of thousands who would never dare poke their noses into the Lefèvre or the Redfern. The austere little box-like houses are there, crying for three or four modest modern English pictures on their cream-distempored walls. I would close down the Medici Society rather than the Slade, and I would urge modern painters to show their stuff in the provincial cities and the country towns. We need our painters more than ever, not less.

Yours faithfully,

LIONEL BRETT





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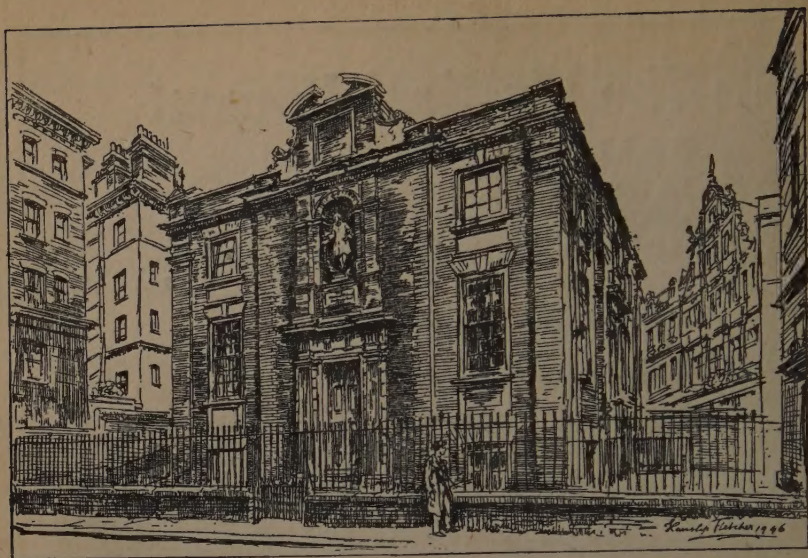
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